



OHIO OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ASSOCIATION

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Senate Education Committee

Interested Party Testimony – House Bill 8 (Parental Notification Requirements)

December 12th, 2023

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on House Bill 8. I appreciate the committee taking the time to consider this legislation and the willingness of the bill sponsors, Representatives Swearingen and Carruthers, to engage in constructive dialogue regarding amendments.

During testimony last week, the bill sponsors made it clear that their goal is to ensure parents have a seat at the table as it relates to the care and instruction their children receive in school. Our members share this goal, both as dedicated health care providers and in many cases as parents themselves. Nearly half of OOTA's members work in the school setting, and parents are vital allies and advocates for their children, especially those receiving services under an IEP.

Occupational therapy providers working in the K-12 setting often spend time working with children to address developmental issues ranging from simple handwriting assistance to activities of daily living (ADL's). Often, these providers develop trusted relationships with the students they serve and are usually in the position to observe changes to the behavioral health of those children. In some cases, children or adolescents will confide in their provider regarding an issue or struggle.

In these situations, an Occupational Therapy provider would provide these updates directly to parents or supervisory staff who would do so. However, there are rare situations where a child may specifically request that information is not disclosed to a guardian, or the provider feels that disclosing this information would compromise the child's safety or willingness to share needs moving forward. Occupational therapy providers are trained and licensed to deal with these difficult incidents, as are other healthcare providers working in the school setting.

As you consider HB 8, I would raise two issues that should be discussed. The first is to ensure that HB 8 does not impede the ability of healthcare providers to provide care and support to children in the school setting. It is important that all children feel that school is a safe place for them. The second issue would be to ensure that HB 8 does not conflict with any powers or responsibilities vested with related services providers under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which governs the care of children on IEP's.

Most importantly, I would encourage you to amend HB 8 to ensure that providers have discretion when concerns over potential abuse, neglect, or abandonment are present. This would be rare, but consistent with our scope of practice and professional judgement. Thank you for your consideration and your thoughtful service to Ohio's children. Please consider OOTA a resource on this and other important issues.