

# OSHGAC

## **SB 356 Proponent Testimony November 30, 2022**

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 356. My name is Bethany Whidden and I am a resident of Troy, Ohio. I have served as a speech-language pathologist in Ohio for 15 years and I am currently serving as Related Services Supervisor at the Miami County Educational Service Center. My responsibilities include supervision of 25 school-based speech-language pathologists and 3 school psychologists across 9 local school districts. I am also here on behalf of the Ohio Speech and Hearing Governmental Affairs Coalition (OSHGAC), representing thousands of speech and hearing healthcare professionals across Ohio.

Senate Bill 356 extends the age limit for a child to be identified under the Developmental Delay educational disability category from six years through age 9. This change would mirror the definition in federal law under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which allows eligibility for special education services under the Developmental Delay category until a child turns ten. The passing of this bill will allow evaluation teams additional time to determine the comprehensive needs of a student, ensuring each student receives the interventions necessary to succeed.

Under current law, students “age out” of the Developmental Delay category once they turn six years of age, which is often when students begin kindergarten. Young children frequently continue to demonstrate developmental delays after reaching school age, despite receiving early intervention and specialized services in preschool. Students who are identified under the Developmental Delay category in preschool are required to be reevaluated and placed into one of 13 educational disability categories prior to turning six years old. In many cases, due to the limited options, a student is identified under the category of Speech-Language Impairment which does not always fully describe the scope of the child’s needs. Extending the Developmental Delay identification through age nine allows time for the extent of a child’s needs to become clear, allowing for proper identification and ensuring continuity of the services and supports these children require as they begin elementary school.

In August 2021, a survey sent to Ohio special educators revealed that of the 600 respondents, 55% believed that when students were no longer identified under the Developmental Delay disability category as they transitioned to school-age, the services received in Kindergarten were inadequate most or all of the time. The same survey indicated that over 96% of respondents believed that students

who no longer had Developmental Delay as an identification option had to “wait to fail” to qualify for the appropriate services.

I have seen students denied necessary services such as physical or occupational therapy because the educational team was unable to identify an appropriate educational disability category to fit the needs of the student. In each of these cases, were Developmental Delay still available as an option to the team, the students would have been able to receive those services.

Research supports the importance of early intervention; students are at risk for increased gaps in skills when appropriate services are not in place as early as possible. By extending the age of Developmental Delay to age ten, evaluation teams will be better able to make decisions regarding the educational needs of a child based on the child’s progress in the curriculum and exposure to elementary education instruction. Senate Bill 356 will allow schools to best meet the needs of the whole child, without having to seek a separate, qualifying condition to receive the appropriate services. Such a change will dramatically help young students receive the appropriate support they need to achieve their full potential.

On behalf of speech and hearing professionals across the state of Ohio, I encourage you to support this important legislation that will ensure Ohio’s schools are providing the right interventions and supports to our students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bethany Whidden". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Bethany Whidden