

HB 436
Proponent Testimony
Senate Education Committee

Chairwoman Lehner, Vice Chairman Brenner, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to provide written comments in support of HB 436. The Ohio Speech and Hearing Governmental Affairs Coalition (OSHGAC) represents more than 2,500 speech-language pathologists and audiologists across the state of Ohio. Collectively, the services of these professionals impact the communication development of tens of thousands of children in Ohio. We would like to thank the bill's sponsor, Chairwoman Lehner and Vice Chairman Brenner for the extensive amount of work they have put into the development of HB 436, which aims to improve dyslexia screening, intervention, and remediation.

Reading, at its core, is a high-level extension of early language development. Language and speech sound disorders are highly prevalent in children, affecting 15% of children ages 4-6 years, including those without any other associated disability or diagnosis. These early speech and language disorders are highly predictive of delays in learning to read once a child enters school. Of particular concern is that more than 30% of children with speech and language disorders can expect to be diagnosed with reading disorders in elementary school. For these reasons, the assessment and treatment of dyslexia is within the scope of practice of speech-language pathologists, as outlined by the American Speech-Language Hearing Association. In schools, speech-language pathologists play a critical role in diagnosing and treating reading disorders like dyslexia, particularly when they co-occur with, or result from, speech or language disorders. Literacy outcomes for the children of Ohio stand to benefit from the inclusion of these highly skilled professionals as schools determine how to best screen for, diagnose, and treat dyslexia and other reading disorders.

We support language in the substitute bill ensuring that speech-language pathologists are represented on the Ohio Dyslexia Committee, which is being created in the bill. Speech-language pathologists have the expertise and training that is essential for remediating and managing reading disorders in children, and their insight will be useful as the Ohio Dyslexia Committee develops the Guidebook and issues recommendations.

In that same vein, we believe it is just as important to have a speech-language pathologist represented on the multidisciplinary teams that the legislation requires school districts to form. While the composition of these teams is not specified in the legislation, it is our hope that the Ohio Dyslexia Committee will recommend, and school districts will include, that a speech-language pathologist serve on the local multidisciplinary teams.

Thank you for taking our comments into consideration. On behalf of OSHGAC I would like to thank Representative Baldrige for introducing HB 436 and for this committee's thorough work on this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Jennell C. Vick, Ph.D., CCC-SLP
Chair, Ohio Speech and Hearing Government Affairs Coalition
Executive Director, Cleveland Hearing and Speech Center