

To the Honorable Representative Owens and Members of the Education Committee,

I am writing on the behalf of our Multidistrict special education unit in support of House Bill 1188. I have been the director of the WilMac Unit for approximately 14 years. In this time, we have struggled to recruit and maintain licensed and credentialed special education staff. Most of our success in enlisting teaching staff has come from a “grow your own” approach. We recruit local individuals with bachelor’s degrees with the intention for them to attend graduate school and work as a special education teacher in training. The reality is the number of applicants with 4-year degrees willing to return to school is not fully meeting the special education needs of our local districts. Recent advances in technology, and the availability of online coursework at the undergraduate level has created options not previously available.

Many of our districts have dedicated paraprofessionals working to support students in both general and special education. Many of these individuals have aspired to obtain an advanced degree but the avenues have not existed until now. With this legislation a paraprofessional working in special education can advance to a special education technician, and then if desired, a special education teacher. The purpose of this tiered approach is to provide training for all our paraprofessionals. We hire paraprofessionals to work with some of the most involved and challenging students and in many circumstances are the least experienced. This approach will allow paraprofessionals to not only enhance their experiences but will also put them on a track for an advanced degree and licensure.

The Special Education Technician will have the skills to support the licensed teachers in essential tasks such as paperwork management and instructional delivery. Special education paperwork can be an overwhelming requirement distracting the teacher. The technician can assist in limiting some of this paperwork burden allowing the teacher to direct more attention to the students.

Finally, I became a director in the state approximately the same time the speech language paraprofessional (SLPP) certificate was being established. During this time, I remember many of the larger districts did not have a need for SLPPs, as they were well staffed with Speech Language Pathologists (SLP). Over the years, due to the increased SLP shortage, many of those larger districts now hire SLPPs as they currently struggle to recruit SLPs. Although the special education technician may be viewed as not necessary in some larger districts it is similar to the SLPP certificate and in my opinion the opportunity to build teacher infrastructure. The Special education certificate/credential pathways are vital for us to continue to successfully meet the needs of students we serve in special education.

Thank you for your time and consideration, I stand for questions.

Sincerely,

Shawn Huss Ed. S.

Director