

March 6, 2013

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION:

I am writing this letter in regard to House Bill 2755. I am an orientation and mobility specialist in the state of Oregon. It was a great loss to Oregon when the School for the Blind was closed. This did away with an important placement for students within the continuum of services provided in our state for our Blind and Visually Impaired students. With the creation The Blind and Visually Impaired Student Fund (BVIS) opportunities were increased for many important areas recognized as vital for the education of this low incidence population, especially in the area of the Expanded Core Curriculum for Blind and Visually students. Research clearly shows that without these important skill areas, our students are less likely to be a successful, productive member of society. These are areas not covered by the general education curriculum as students with vision are likely to gain these skills incidentally as they go through their school years. These areas include: Independent Living Skills; Social Interaction Skills; Orientation & Mobility Skills; Self-Determination; Recreational and Leisure Skills; Sensory Efficiency Skills; Technology specific to the B/VI and Compensatory or Functional Academic Skills. The BVIS Fund has, in my opinion, provided important opportunities for more students in our state than OSSB did in its last few years.

Some of the wonderful services I have been able to include for my students have been:

Summer Camp Experience which provided training in all of the expanded core areas.

Track Meets

Paralympics (judo, tandem biking, beeper ball, goal ball)

State Goal Ball Tournament

Family Skate Night

Opportunity for all teachers of the visually impaired in OR to attend our National Conference last summer (learn the latest teaching best practices in our field).

Low Vision Clinic and Low Vision Devices for our students

Technology Assistance provided by an expert in the unique needs of our population of students

I am sure there are more areas that I have skipped over. I am very pleased with the way the BVIS fund has evolved over the past few years and the management of this funding.

Two areas in HB 2755 are very upsetting to me. The first is the proposal that vision screening for students in public schools will be paid for by BVIS. This has nothing to do with Blind/Visually Impaired students and their needs. Providing this funding would not help one student who is Blind/Visually

Impaired and has nothing to do with the purpose of the BVIS. This funding would greatly deplete the funds that were specifically allocated for students who qualify for services as a blind or visually impaired student under Oregon Rules.

My second area of concern in this bill is that the administration of the BVIS fund could be given to people who are not experts in the area of blindness. Our student's needs are very complex and unknown to most outside of our field. Administration of these important funds needs to be in the hands of people who see blindness as a series of obstacles that can be overcome and that these students can lead successful, happy and independent lives.

Please carefully consider my concerns as they represent the concerns of the dedicated teachers of the blind and visually impaired in Oregon.

Sincerely,

Mary Bjornskov

Teacher of the Visually Impaired

Orientation & Mobility Specialist