

Submitter: John Libby

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Education

Measure: SB283

I am a high school Special Education teacher in a suburban Oregon school district. In my 11 year career I have worked at 3 high schools in Oregon as a secondary case manager of students with learning disabilities and behavioral challenges. Over my career the number of Special Education teachers on my team has decreased while my case load has increased seemingly every year. Oregon has no legal limit for the number of students a case manager so I am concerned that this trend may continue without intervention. Hiring and keeping special education teachers seems to be a challenge. On my current team of 11 teachers 2 of them have emergency licenses and are not certified to teach Special Education. Also on that team are multiple burnt out individuals who are actively looking to switch from Special Ed to Gen Ed which will further compound the problem.

Staffing for paraprofessionals is a constant challenge. A district I used to work in had an administrator who said they couldn't hire paraprofessionals faster than they were quitting. Since the pandemic began, no school I have worked for has been fully staffed with paraprofessionals. Hiring paraprofessionals is so hard because of the various roles they do. Some might be helping students eat and go to the bathroom while others could be supporting IEP students with a math class. Due to an increase in behaviors and physical violence we have lost many paraprofessionals working with the students who have the highest needs. New hires tend to be siphoned to the high need positions so paraprofessional positions in the "lower need" areas are not prioritized and the positions are not usually filled. A program I used to work in had 3 paraprofessional spots budgeted to support students with behaviors. Currently only 1 position in this program is filled and 2 have been open this entire school year. The current pay for classified staff in my schools is worse than many other local businesses. Panda express famously pays more hourly for a new employee than my old school district for an experienced Paraprofessional. Classified staff roles are vital for the success of a functioning Special Ed program.

The legislation described in this bill would be extremely helpful to solve these staffing issues. Increasing pay for Special Education teachers and staff would make a big difference in morale and decrease the amount of people leaving/burning out. A pay increase might incentivize master teachers to switch into Special Education. I would be proud to work in the first state to formally acknowledge and reward the difficult role we do in Special Education.