

Sawyer Viola
PSU CCS First Cohort Graduate
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Senate Bill 572

Thank you for having me here today.
My name is Sawyer Viola and I have autism.

Not the become a doctor or win in Las Vegas kind of Autism.

But the everyday challenges kind that makes ordinary life more of a struggle for me.

I work for Nike and I love it.

But I know I am one of the lucky ones.

70% of adults with Autism are either unemployed or underemployed.

I would have been one of them. Living at home, afraid to speak up.

Four years at Portland State University made the difference for me.

I was in the first graduating class for career and community studies.

When I started I was quiet, unsure of myself and convinced after 12 years of public school, I wasn't very smart.

At PSU I saw there were things I could do, things I knew and a whole community of different types of people. Places I fit.

I started moving through the world like I had something to contribute, something to share. I started talking and haven't shut up since!

The staff and programs pushed me to find my strengths instead of focusing on my failings.

I wanted to contribute, to be a part of my community but didn't know how.

This program opened up my world and changed my path.

After graduation I went to work for NIKE where I build AirMax shoes with a great team of people.

I am on NIKE's supported employment board where I give speeches to other companies looking to hire people like me.

I live independently now, earning my own way and doing my own laundry!

And giving back to my community....

I started a YouTube channel where I interview people like myself, caregivers and providers and employers to help bring awareness to our community.

PSU gave me the opportunity to show my hidden potential.

People with disabilities are different. But like every one of you, we want to fit in, we want to belong. We want to contribute.

To succeed all we need is an opportunity. So throw us the ball and let us run. You'll be glad you did!

Please support Senate Bill 572 and fund postsecondary access for people with intellectual disabilities.

<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/0PFkEf-Dd9E>