

Good afternoon Chair Dembrow and members of the committee.

Thank you for allowing me some time to talk about this very important bill. My name is Harry Esteve, I live in Portland and I am the father of a young woman with Down syndrome. Down syndrome is a genetic disorder that affects both physical and intellectual development.

As some of you may know, I am a state employee, but I am speaking today as a private citizen — and taking a mid-afternoon lunch break to do so.

Even before Rachel was born, we were told she might not talk, would likely never learn to read, would be forever dependent on others, and in general would have a difficult time in life. I have a vivid and disappointing memory of a meeting during which we were seeking educational services for Rachel and were told she might be denied them because she was, and I quote: “uneducable” — that is, based on her IQ the services would be wasted on her.

Let’s fast-forward to today. Rachel is a cheerful adult who works part-time as a teacher at a neighborhood preschool, lives in a cozy apartment with her roommate Lucy, and performs modern dance in local theaters. She lives an independent, self-motivated life that none of us imagined in those early days.

A critical factor in her independence was her decision to attend the Community and Career Studies program at Portland State University. And it was HER decision. My wife, Ann, and I were skeptical at first that Rachel could succeed in a four-year university program. But Rachel was determined — she applied and was accepted into the very first cohort of what was then Think College Oregon.

Over those four years she studied race and social justice concepts, gender and family, art, literature and history. She snowshoed with the Outdoor Program, attended dances — enjoyed campus life. It wasn’t long before Ann and I began to notice clear changes in Rachel. The sophistication of her writing and communication skills improved remarkably, as did her ability to think critically. Her self-confidence grew in everything from public speaking to getting around town by public transportation or ride-share.

One of CCS’s many strengths is its commitment to Person Centered Planning — a practice that brings together supporters, family and friends to focus on the student’s qualities and hopes and sets a concrete plan for their future. In Rachel’s case, the planning led to her outspoken desire to care for and teach children. That led to a partnership with CCS, Rachel’s brokerage and the state voc-rehab program collaborating with Rachel to find her a meaningful job. It all worked. And I have seen it work for many other students, not just my daughter.

Investing in the Community and Career Studies model for public universities and community colleges is a solid choice for Oregon. The results are clear: education, independence and, at heart, happiness for those who might otherwise be denied

Harry Esteve  
1515 SE Miller St.  
Portland OR 97202  
503-432-6685  
harryestev@gmail.com