

Submitter: Erick Welsh

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Education

Measure: HB5014

Charlie's story

Distinguished legislators, this story is about my son, Charlie. Charlie is a very bright young man with autism spectrum disorder. We were able to identify this when he was four years old due to communication delays and sensory seeking behaviors. Charlie has always had difficulty building and maintaining relationships and navigating social situations. He was expelled from preschool due to his propensity for biting others who upset him. He was bullied throughout elementary and middle school.

However, one of the symptoms of his autism is also a laser like focus. He has always loved computers and has a brain that works things out on levels I can't imagine. Luckily, while a student in Oregon City schools, he received autism services and school supports. Many of these services and school supports came directly from regional services. Trainings provided to staff, expertise imparted, visuals, and manipulatable items were all part of this experience. High school was not easy for Charlie. Socially, he dealt with many of the same bullying problems that he had experienced in middle and elementary school. The supports he received made all the difference. He was given accommodations on his IEP to be able to use his personal laptop in all of his classes because handwriting was an issue, as well as extra time and individualized proficiency-based standards. He was given a safe place to go when he got extremely frustrated and would historically externalize his communication to an almost dangerous degree. Professionals who were part of his school community and IEP team were there to work with his mother and I to ensure that Charlie had the best chance of success.

He ended up being a programming lead on the school's robotic team and graduating at age 16 with community college classes already under his belt. He got a job as a software engineer making \$50 an hour and, last week, at age 18, we found out that, after an arduous four round interview process with engineers and hiring managers, he was offered a software engineer job with Apple that pays upwards of \$160,000 per year.

I have a hard time believing that any of this would've been possible were not for the regional autism services provided through very important state funding, I hope that the importance of this funding comes through in my store in the stories of other parents and educators here today. Please continue to fund the best possible outcomes for all students. Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

Erick Welsh  
Oregon City