



March 23, 2023

Dear Chair Steiner and Chair Sanchez:

I'm writing to highlight the need for increased funding to Regional Inclusive Services (RIS). Northwest Regional Education Service District (NWRESD) is one of eight agencies in Oregon contracted by the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) to provide services to students experiencing low incidence disabilities.

Oregon's RIS programs serve about 12,000 students statewide who are Blind or Visually Impaired, Deaf or Hard of Hearing, experience Autism, those who experience Traumatic Brain Injury, those who experience Severe Orthopedic Impairments, and those who are Deafblind. We provide training, technical tools, and additional support to educators so that all schools, no matter their size or location, can deliver an inclusive education.

Unfortunately, adjusting for inflation, per student funding for RIS programs has been reduced significantly year after year since 2007. As a result, critical services for the students and families we serve have been reduced or eliminated from many programs.

In 2022, we requested an additional \$10m allocation to RIS programs. Although we did not see additional funding from the general fund budget, we did receive \$8.5m in ARP-ESSER-III funding statewide as a short-term fix to prevent significant cuts. These funds will expire soon. For 23-25, we are requesting an additional \$23.7m be allocated from the general fund to RIS programs, in alignment with the ODE's Policy Option Package Estimates.

These funds will be used to intensify services to students experiencing complex needs by recruiting and hiring additional specialized staff - Teachers of the Visually Impaired, Teachers of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and Autism Spectrum Disorder Specialists.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cathleen Jensen", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Cathleen Jensen  
Executive Director, K-12 Special Education

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