

April 8, 2023

Joint Committee on Ways and Means  
Sen. Elizabeth Steiner  
Rep. Tawna Sanchez, Co-Chair

Co-Chairs Steiner and Sanchez and Honorable Committee Members:

My name is Mary Buchta, and I am a member of Oregon School Employees Association (OSEA). I work in the Douglas County School District. I've been working 15 years now as a 10-month employee, in a middle school. I've worked in the SPED Departments for 20 years total.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of key investments to build a better Oregon with higher quality student-centered educational experiences for all students, workers and working families.

For 5 years, I worked as a case worker, under a Special Education (SPED) Case Manager at a high school in Washington State and I dealt with all kinds of behaviors at that school. I have worked as an Instructional Assistant for 13 years, where I work directly with students. For 2 years now, I have been working as a SPED Paperwork Manager, where I support the teams that are Case Managers/Teachers. I still have duties that directly support students in addition to the support I give to the teachers and administration. I enjoy working with the students as I get to proactively assist them as they work hard to achieve life skills, social, behavioral, and academic goals. I get to connect with the students as they learn new experiences and show the fun side of themselves. There are also special education students who need more attention and support due to them having high needs. This is where we need training.

Over the past 20 years I have been supporting special education students in the variety of positions as I listed above, I have asked several times to be trained in how to de-escalate an issue before it becomes an undesirable situation. I have been denied every time. I used to work with students that would hit, bite, throw things, escape, harm themselves, etcetera. Any source of training that would help identify an issue arising, to redirect, and to problem solve, is something all instructional assistants and ANY other employee who works with students need to be trained in. As professional educators, we never know when a student is going to be triggered, but we should be prepared to ensure that we are protecting other students' safety and our own. Lack of access to

currently required training for those of us who support special education is a disservice to our students, their families, and school employees.

I have been in several situations where I have been hit, pushed, punched, and attempted to be stabbed with scissors and pencils. We don't have a "Just Cause" with our contract, so I can be terminated at anytime for almost any reason.

My job gets scarry sometimes doing what we do. It really feels like we should pray for the best and be prepared for the worst. Don't get me wrong, I LOVE my job, children are our future, and I want to help the state make classified jobs better, for students, for our community and for my colleagues.

If I didn't love my job, I would be off working somewhere that would pay me for my years of experience. I make very little pay. It's insulting, and I couldn't do it without my husband. So, it is crucial that as professional staff members, who work daily with IEP students, that we respond well to students who have a variety of challenging behaviors. We need training to support special education students, so that we give them the best educational experience we can. They deserve it and we do too. We need to be prepared for anything thrown at us, so we can reduce how many times we are injured on the job.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Mary Buchta  
Roseburg