

Chair Neron, and members of the House Committee on Education, my name is Kate Koehler Lefco and I live in Portland, OR. I am a strong advocate for quality public education for all students, a proud graduate of Oregon public schools, a parent to three public school students and an elementary school social worker in support of HB 4079.

I work at an elementary school where 64% of our students come from underserved communities and 27% are students with disabilities. Additionally, we have multiple houseless families in our community; a number that changes throughout the year as more students are added. On any given day, my work priorities include supporting our houseless families and other high needs families, facilitating small groups focusing on social emotional skills or mental health needs, conducting suicide assessments, responding to mental health and/or behavioral crisis, family engagement, and much more. Even though I am not a SPED teacher, I see firsthand how the underfunding of our most vulnerable students not only impacts those students, but impacts the whole school community. As a public school employee, myself and my colleagues are constantly doing the best we can with the minimal resources and time we have. My SPED colleagues are simply unable to ensure their students' IEP goals are met because of the underfunding. This underfunding also means that staff like myself who are here to support the entire student body (including our SPED students) often spend a disproportionate amount of time filling gaps and responding to crisis that would be preventable with sufficient funding.

Additionally- our houseless students deserve more time and resources. My current position is only funded at .5 and its hard to feel like I'm doing right by my students and families when the needs far exceed the time allotted to my position. I see the resiliency in these families and students and I also know they deserve more. A robust public education system means we fund according to need and every student deserves to receive the resources they need to succeed. The 11% cap on SPED weights is an arbitrary cap that does damage to our kids, and pits those who need support the most against one another. Please vote yes on HB 4079, and ensure it receives the funding it needs so our special education programs and houseless students can receive the funding they need.