

COURTNEY NERON
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
DISTRICT 26



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Testimony in Support of HB 4068

February 5, 2024

Vice-Chair Hudson and Vice-Chair Wright and members of the House Committee on Education.

For the record, I am Courtney Neron, State Representative for House District 26, writing in support of HB 4068.

Oregon schools are facing significant challenges, including increases in behavioral health needs and underfunded programming. Our state and federal laws require Child Find and Free and Appropriate Public Education in the least restrictive environment, yet all too often we hear that our well intentioned K-12 public education system is experiencing high class sizes, impossible caseloads, teacher burnout, and inability to fully meet a student's learning needs.

As we learned in our interim hearing, the [High Cost Disability Fund](#) needs significant investment beyond what is currently allocated and as such, we are unable to provide services to some of the students who need it most. House Bill 4068 invests \$150 million into the High Cost Disability Fund. \$100 million of these dollars would be to support existing statutory obligations. And the additional \$50 million would be to expand the uses of high cost disability to include a community eligibility component.

Currently the High Cost Disability Fund is only for students whose education delivery costs the district more than \$30,000, but this bill would add a component that allows for community eligibility, as well. It is an attempt at answering the question about how we invest equitably in Oregon communities that experience disproportionate rates of Special Education. Many of these communities also experience correlating high rates of generational poverty and addiction. We must ensure that resources are distributed in ways that reduce a patchwork map of "have" and "have not" districts, and instead ensure that no matter which district an Oregon student attends, that they will receive a welcoming, safe, supportive and well-resourced education.

Community eligibility for the High Cost Disability Fund is a way to acknowledge that some Oregon communities face disproportionately higher rates of Special Education

needs. Washington State recently included community eligibility provisions and it is my hope that with the 2024 session, Oregon can take further steps to ensure more equitable education funding.

Across the state, teachers and support staff are stretched thin, meeting the often widely varying needs of their students, and with limited resources at hand. This situation is not only detrimental to the students who are not receiving the support they need, but it also places an undue burden on our educators. In light of such challenges, I urge you to consider allowing community eligibility to be added to the uses for our state's High-Cost Disability Fund. Such an option would provide needed flexibility and adequate funding to communities to support our students with special needs. It would allow for more comprehensive and effective support services, which are crucial for academic success and overall student well-being.

Of course, it is imperative that we fund this change. This bill adds the needed funding to the High-Cost Disability Fund, without which we would risk further disparity. By increasing funding, we can ensure that districts with the highest costs and disproportionate costs related to special education, are able to deliver on their students' rights to a quality education.

HB 4068 will provide an avenue for communities facing the most intense challenges to apply for additional funding to best serve their students.

Thank you for your consideration. I urge your support and passage of the bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Courtney Neron". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'C'.

Representative Courtney Neron
House District 26
Wilsonville, Charbonneau, King City, Sherwood,
Tigard/Bull Mountain, and Parrett Mountain