

Submitter: Samantha Stidham

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Higher Education and Workforce
Development

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3053

Hello! My name is Samantha Stidham and I am a speech-language pathologist at Northwest Regional Education Service District. I am an augmentative/alternative communication (AAC) specialist serving K-12 students in some of our ESD's most rural districts in Columbia and Clatsop Counties. I am writing in strong support of HB 3503. For students with complex communication needs due to autism, cerebral palsy, and other etiologies, AAC is not only a means of communication - it's a way for these students to connect with others, advocate for themselves, and share their thoughts, feelings, and ideas. Just because someone cannot speak does not mean they have nothing to say. These students often go for years without full, meaningful, functional access to communication for a variety of reasons - access to trial equipment can be limited, insurance co-pays for this type of equipment can be incredibly costly, and in rural areas there is a massive shortage of SLPs in general, let alone SLPs trained to provide effective AAC therapy and obtain AAC devices through insurance. An opportunity for individuals using AAC to come together, connect with one another, and expand their AAC skills in a summer camp environment would be such a gift. An opportunity for more clinicians to be trained in this very important work would be a huge boon to Oregonians with complex communication needs and their families. I strongly urge the legislature to support this incredibly important bill that will benefit some of the most vulnerable and underserved Oregonians.