

To whom it may concern:

I'm approaching my support of house Bill 2953 from two different angles. I am a special education QMHP in addition to being a parent of a child with a developmental disability. I can tell you firsthand from both those angles that the current funding for special education consistently hurts children, sometimes badly. The more vulnerable and high needs the student, the more harm that is caused. It is absolutely horrifying what children and their parents go through if they face a level need as high as intellectual disability.

The current lack of funding manifests in many ways. Two of the most impactful are understaffing of support paraprofessionals and incomprehensibly high caseloads for special educators due to inadequate FTE. Paraprofessionals are paid so poorly there is a high turnover rate, and the most qualified and talented people often refuse to reply. Staffing of paraprofessional is so thin that children often do not receive the support within the general education setting that they are entitled to according to their IEP's. Special education school psychologists, speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, and learning specialists are spread so thin by their outrageous caseloads they also struggle to meet legally mandated deadlines regarding IEP's and to provide the service minutes mandated in those IEP's. This also leads to high employee turnover, which in and of itself hurts vulnerable kids who rely on a strong relationship with a helping adult in order to learn. District special education administrators are often turned into egregious obstructionists by refusing to approve critical services that the school IEP team agrees are desperately needed for children. This is perhaps the very most harmful special education, practice, driven by lack of funding. I have seen this from both the professional and parent perspective. The long-term and potentially lifelong adverse impact on disabled children is heartbreaking. Then, these districts have to spend tons of money anyways defending themselves against the frequent lawsuits brought on by parents of children who are being underserved.

For a state that often has so much revenue we give it back in the form of kickers this is a moral embarrassment.

In closing, I have worked as a general education, teacher, school, counselor, and now special education qualified mental health provider over the past 35 years. As a result, I have an extremely broad perspective on how schools function. Special education is hands-down the most impacted area of education when it comes to funding. Please give your most urgent and careful consideration when considering your vote on this bill. Then do the right thing and vote yes on house bill 2953.

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