

Submitter: Beth Outterson
On Behalf Of: Sacred Organizing Coalition
Committee: House Committee On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2953

Dear Chair Neron, Vice-Chair Dobson, Vice-Chair McIntire, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to making sure every child gets the education and support they deserve in Oregon.

As a concerned Oregonian of the Sabin neighborhood in NE Portland, and a member of Westminster Presbyterian Church, I am writing to you to advocate for the passage of HB 2953 and legislation that fully funds special education services. I am also with the Sacred Organizing Coalition, whose organizations and initiatives share a commitment to organizing the hundreds of community-based teams we work with - and the thousands of everyday Oregonians that are part of these local groups - to move us toward an Oregon where all belong.

My teacher friends know the situation very well. They tell me that special education is underfunded because the state puts a cap on how much it can pay the schools for special ed programming. Currently the state funds up to 10% of students who need services, but 14% of the students actually qualify for the services. This means that 3% of students don't have funding. Schools feel an enormous pressure to spread out their services for more students than they have funding for. This situation shortchanges the school system and does a disservice to our students by providing them with diluted, subpar programming.

I believe that every student in Oregon deserves the support they need. I believe that teachers and staff should be equipped with the resources necessary for every child to succeed. But because of an outdated funding formula designed over 30 years ago, Oregon is currently leaving out over 19,000 students or almost 1/4th of the 80,000 students in its funding. That's even though the need has drastically increased for special education services, with diagnoses for those with autism or anxiety and children with other needs continuing to rise.

Doing nothing means young people not getting basic support for their needs. It means more teachers and staff burn out from not having enough resourcing. Underfunded mandates mean local schools having to choose cuts in various programs. Doing nothing affects all of us.

We cannot just let an old law from the 1990s dictate whose children get to belong in Oregon schools. As a community member who knows the importance of supporting the children in my community, I know that supporting them should be based on need, not a dollar sign.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration,
Beth Outterson
Concerned Citizen

