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On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2953

I am writing to submit testimony in support of HB 2953.

In 2018, my son, Hugo began showing signs of dysregulation. At first, these signs were subtle—he suddenly disliked his favorite teachers and was kept after school to finish assignments. Eventually, he started experiencing panic attacks on the way to school. His school counselor was kind, and she lacked the training to understand the neuroscience behind the interrelatedness of learning and emotional regulation. She sent us home and asked us to return when Hugo was "regulated."

Middle school was incredibly painful and compounded by the disruptions of COVID-19. By that time, Hugo had been diagnosed with profound anxiety, depression, ADHD, and a nonverbal learning disability. His intelligence ranked in the 98th percentile for his age, yet his processing speed was in the 9th percentile—a cognitive spread seen in fewer than 2% of the population. This kind of disparity presents unique challenges:

- * Processing delays can make students appear unresponsive or defiant when, in reality, they are struggling to keep up.
- * Executive functioning deficits make it difficult to adapt to new information, often leading to perceived rigidity or oppositional behavior.
- * Missing key pieces of information leads to feelings of fear, shame, and anxiety, which can result in shutdowns—often misinterpreted as defiance.
- * Difficulty focusing and completing work can escalate into mood-related distress and mental health crises.

Hugo's middle school experience was not just unsupportive—it was harmful. The school's educators and administrators were quick to frustration, dismissive, and in some cases, emotionally abusive. By the time he reached high school, he was experiencing daily panic attacks and episodes of suicidal ideation.

Still, I recognize that Hugo's teachers were operating in the wake of the pandemic, under increasing demands and with limited resources. Though Portland Public Schools declared student mental health their top priority, teachers were given more responsibilities, larger class sizes, and less space. They were overwhelmed; as a result, students like Hugo suffered. I believe that if his teachers had received support, learning opportunities, and space to "see" him, he might not have endured the school-related trauma he did. Maybe he would have been able to imagine a way in which he could "learn." Maybe he wouldn't have felt like he was better off dead.

As a full-time working single mother since 2011, I have had to take it upon myself to learn how to support my son. I have studied books like Ross Greene's *Lost at School*, which helps teachers identify the underlying causes of student behavior, and Chan Hellman's *Hope Rising*, which demonstrates how educators can use the science of hope in the classroom. I discovered the nonprofit Neural Education, which provides training on neuroscience to help educators create learning environments where all students are seen, heard, and valued. If these resources had been available to teachers, Hugo's experience could have been different.

Today, Hugo is a freshman at Grant High School. His special education team has saved his life. They listen to us. They prioritize understanding over efficiency. They are thoughtful, kind, and honest. They are also stretched thin. With proper funding, they could not only support Hugo's immediate needs but also empower him to advocate for himself, understand how he learns, and demonstrate his knowledge in ways that work for him.

Without sufficient funding, students like Hugo will continue to be left behind. The 17% of students receiving special education services deserve an education that is just as well-funded as their neurotypical peers.

I urge you to vote YES on HB 2953. A "no" vote disregards the ADA and the Rehabilitation Act, which prohibit discrimination based on disability. Beyond that, "no" vote sends a clear message that Oregon does not care about students like Hugo. And that is too devastating to imagin