

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 parent of students in the Bend LaPine School District, I am writing to you today 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.

I have a child, a delightful 2nd grader, named Alex who utilizes special education and IEP services at our neighborhood school. He is thriving in school with the supports and adaptations the school and staff have been able to provide. He flourishes in the social environment with his peers, both typically and uniquely developing, and they enjoy him immensely. He gives the other students opportunity to practice engaging with those that may communicate or learn a little differently, but mostly he is their friend. Among other things he is learning to write, to do math, and has a love of books and music. My older two children, both middle schoolers, have peers and friends that utilize 504 &/or IEP services and enjoy having a school community that is inclusive to many types of learners and people.

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But because of an outdated funding formula designed over 30 years ago, Oregon is currently leaving out over 19,000 students or almost 1/4th of the 80,000 students in its funding.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 burnout 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 parent of a child who needs these services, and as a community member who knows the importance of supporting children, I believe all of our children belong. Our funding should reflect this truth.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration,

  
Jay Henderson

2/16/25