

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

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 two children in the Hillsboro School District I am writing 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.

As a pastor who works with youth and their families, I recognize that any support we can offer in a congregational setting is only part of a larger system of support that each child needs. Because our community is composed of children who rely on special education services, I have seen that such support, more robust than what our congregation can provide, has been incredibly valuable to the children and their parents.

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But because of an outdated funding formula designed over 30 years ago, Oregon is currently leaving out over 19,000 students or almost 1/4th of the 80,000 students in its funding.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 leader in a faith community where children rely on these services, and one who sees the value of communities of belonging, our funding should help create stronger pathways of belonging for our youth.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration,

Rev. Henry Martinez