

TO: Senate Committee on Education

RE: Support of SB 0953

DATE: February 18th, 2025

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Bianca Spain and I am a student at Western Oregon University. I am writing to express my strong support for Senate Bill 953, which seeks to establish a task force dedicated to developing best practices for the transition from Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) programs to kindergarten. As a former paraprofessional working in both elementary and middle school settings, I have witnessed firsthand the struggles that children with special needs face as they transition into kindergarten. These transitions are critical moments in a child's educational journey, and the lack of clear, established best practices often leads to unnecessary challenges and anxiety, not only for the children but also for their families.

This bill is especially significant because it ensures that the necessary accommodations, adaptations, special equipment, and services required for a child with a disability will be available and ready for use on the very first day of kindergarten. The bill also ensures that each child will have an individualized education program (IEP) or education plan developed to meet their specific needs. This is crucial because these plans are the foundation for providing tailored support to each child, ensuring that they are not left behind or overlooked.

Additionally, the inclusion of summer programs to help children with disabilities familiarize themselves with the new school environment is a key component of this bill. These programs can make a world of difference in reducing anxiety many children feel when faced with a new and unfamiliar setting. I have seen how overwhelming it can be for students when they step into a school environment they've never experienced before, often resulting in fear, confusion, and reluctance to participate.

As someone who has been closely involved in translating in IEP meetings, I have witnessed firsthand the concerns of parents who struggle to understand the complexities of these meetings and the services their children will receive. Many parents fear that their child will not be fully supported in a new school setting, especially when there is no clear communication about how accommodations will be implemented. I've also observed students who are terrified to attend

school because they fear the unknown environment, leading to parents, understandably, choosing to keep their children home to avoid the emotional distress. This is a heartbreaking situation that could be alleviated with clearer guidelines and better preparation.

By ensuring that accommodations are ready from day one and that students and parents are better equipped through preparatory summer programs, SB 953 will make a significant positive impact on these children's transitions. It will allow for a smoother, more confident start to their education, helping to avoid the anxiety and fear that many of them experience when entering kindergarten.

As someone who has been deeply touched by the children I've worked with, I strongly urge the support for this bill. SB 953 will provide much needed guidance to school districts, ensuring they are better prepared to meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of children with disabilities. It will also ensure that families are better supported and informed as their children begin their educational journey.

All things considered, Senate Bill 953 represents a vital step toward ensuring that all children with disabilities can transition safely and successfully into kindergarten. I ask that you please lend your support to this important piece of legislation, which will make a meaningful difference in the lives of these children and their families as well.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Bianca Espain