

Chair Neron and members of the committee,

I am writing in support of HB 2953. You have heard much testimony why the changes legislated in this bill are important. I will give my personal story.



My brother John had Down Syndrome and a verbal IQ of around 50. He was born in an era where most babies like him were immediately institutionalized. My parents chose instead to have him live at home and we had the good fortune to live in a school district that provided excellent education, even before IDEA. John learned to read, write and do math. His hearing was bad so he would ask us to write out a word he couldn't hear. He worked throughout his adult life and chose to contribute some of his earnings for his nieces' and nephews' education. When he eventually moved to an adult residence, the workers said that they had a problem - he was the first resident who could read and so he would ask them about notes they left for each other around the house. Such a good problem to have - all because of a good education.

So my first request is that every child have the opportunity that John had to grow in self respect, to learn, and to be able to contribute to the full extent of their multiple abilities.

My second reflection comes from the the many years I worked as a consulting psychologist in K-12 school systems. I remember the time early on when we had an IEP meeting for a child who had been diagnosed as having autism disorder (ASD). Two "experts" from DOE attended the meeting. They were the sole people able to help us with how best to accommodate this girl. This diagnosis was so rare that we had no protocols or programs to support her. We now have students needing accommodation for ASD throughout our system. We need to fund the resulting increase in services to assure they are well served. Yes, there is an increase in kids who need SPED.

Finally, it is essential that this funding come on top of current funding from the state school fund. I am grateful to this committee for taking the time to dig into the complex funding decisions around this issue and glad that this has been emphasized - we need more funding for SPED without taking away from general education. The reality is that we are seeing increasing needs in the general population as well as in those receiving SPED services. For

instance, in 2021, 3.6% of general education students were on 504 plans which generally require increased services but are not covered under SPED funding. We need to serve all well.

Thank you for your thoughtful deliberation around this topic. I hope we can find a way to serve all of our students as they so deeply deserve

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