

Chair Frederick, Vice Chair Weber, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Kay Heston, and I am here to testify in support of Senate Bill 979.

I come before you today as a fierce advocate for disability justice and a former member of the Oregon Student Association, where I helped champion and contribute to this policy. My journey in higher education began at Oregon State University, where I pursued an engineering degree. However, due to a lack of physical accommodations and inadequate support for projects and assignments, I was ultimately unable to continue in that field. In 2020, I switched my major to kinesiology and enrolled in the Dual Partnership Program through Linn-Benton Community College to take physics.

During my time as a student at Oregon State University, I lived in the international dormitory which did not have first floor dorms. Due to this, I had no choice but to live on the second floor of the dormitory, which was frustrating as I use a mobility device. When the fire alarm would go off in the dormitory for drills, the elevators would be blocked because of safety procedures. While I was given notice of when drills would be taking place, it became clear to me that if there was an actual emergency or fire, I would not have a clear method of evacuation. There would be high potential for me to be left behind or forgotten. If there had been an evacuation device for me and others, I would have been able to get down the stairs in emergencies. Unfortunately, there was not any sort of device present.

This is just one example of the multifaceted challenges that students with disabilities face on a daily basis. It ranges from basic accommodations to an inaccessible campus environment. I have a growing concern for future generations of college students with disabilities.

As someone who has experienced discrimination and internalized ableism, I know firsthand the barriers that students with disabilities face. At a time when disability protections and DEI efforts are being undermined, this bill is more urgent than ever. **I urge you to pass SB 979. Thank you.**