

Chair Neron, Vice Chair Dobson, Vice Chair McIntire, and Members of the House Education Committee,

I am a paraeducator in West Linn-Wilsonville SD. I work in an elementary school primarily supporting students with disabilities in an inclusive classroom environment. I am writing in strong support of House Bill 3357.

At the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year I supported a student with disabilities in their general education classroom during the class's math workshop. This student disliked math and didn't want to do the work with me, so they would hit me and kick me to show their objection. If their teacher sent them to the office, then they would attack me again when they returned, in an attempt to return to the office and avoid the work. The case manager and principal didn't hold strong boundaries with them, so this pattern continued for over a month. Between early September and the middle of October I was hit or kicked in the shins on an almost daily basis. I did not receive clear instructions to fill out incident reports for these student-inflicted assaults because this was "just how they are" and "they really struggle with math." The typical response I got when I went to inform the case manager about the challenges was a sympathetic smile and "I'm sorry this happened." For weeks, little action was taken to change the situation. Administration would talk to the student and tell them it wasn't okay, but it would continue again the next day.

This is only one example of the many different assaults I have experienced in my job. I have been hit, kicked, pinched, bit, had my throat grabbed, had various objects thrown at me, been knocked down, and injured tendons chasing after eloping students. Had I filled out a report each time I was assaulted by a student, no matter the severity, I would have filled out over 30 incident reports over the last two and a half school years. Unfortunately, I only recorded about half of the incidents I experienced that have ranged from near misses and mild injuries, to one that required months of physical therapy to resolve. Unless there was an obvious injury as a result of the incident, I was not specifically instructed to fill out an incident report. This is slowly changing in the specific school I work in, but more often I hear from staff members elsewhere that they are encouraged not to fill out reports, even when there is a visible injury.

I am one of many classified staff who have experienced this many unsafe, damaging, and traumatizing student-involved incidents. However, I am one of the few, at least in my school, who submits reports consistently. My district's incident reports are confusing to fill out, and without clear guidance or follow-up from district administration, many employees don't believe it's worth their time and effort to complete them. I've had coworkers ask me "if nothing is going to change, then why should I bother?" Having a statewide safety reporting system for educators would clarify and simplify the reporting process for staff leading to more consistent reporting. This will generate more accurate data across the state. This could also lead to better accountability from school districts to take more action to support students with high needs behaviors. Without reports we can't see the full scope of staff and student safety. Having this data will help the state, school districts, and other stakeholder agencies see where more support is needed.

There are fears that a system like this will push students with disabilities out of classrooms and their neighborhood schools. I understand those fears, but most educators don't want that. We want more support and better resources so we can help the students we have, not push them away. As a paraeducator, I've seen first hand how positive the experience can be for a student with disabilities when they are well supported, and I've also seen how hard things can be when they are not. The first step to making a situation better is to know more about what is going on, and HB 3357 will help the state accomplish this goal.

I urge you to support HB 3357.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jessica Lambert

Paraeducator

Member of the Oregon School Employees Association