

Good afternoon,

My name is Alyssa Potasznik. I have taught special education for the past 15 years in Texas, California, and now Oregon. I have my masters in special education from the University of Texas and won Teacher of the Year in 2021-2022. I am writing to provide my wholehearted support for HB2953.

I was surprised, upon moving to Oregon, how much more robust the continuum of special education services was in Texas, a state that is not known for its support of public schools. I couldn't believe that in my school with about 270 students receiving services (almost identical to my school in Austin), our special education department was half the size.

This means that our caseloads are large here in Oregon, and with the rising number of students with intense needs who are being found eligible for services, it's difficult to provide 32 students with the individualized services and support they need. However, the much bigger issue with insufficient staff is that we are not able to provide a continuum of services- we do not have the staff to support students in their least restrictive environment. This means that some students are relegated to a special ed class even though they could probably do without it if they had a co-teacher in their general education class- but there are too many students who need that and not enough SPED teachers to support. It means that students who have severe needs are dropped into gen ed classes with insufficient support, and they struggle. Many of these students simply stop coming to school- I am horrified at the chronic absenteeism here in Oregon. In order to improve our schools, our systems, and our outcomes for students, **we need more staff**. We need more case managers and push-in teachers. We need more paraprofessionals, who are shamefully underpaid. We need more mental health professionals in schools. We need boots on the ground to do the work that needs to be done, and I will support any bill that moves us to that end.

We can, and must, do better. In the words of Frederick Douglass, "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men." The investments we make today in our most marginalized students will yield far-reaching benefits—not just for them, but for our entire community. When students receive the individualized support they need, they are more likely to stay in school, graduate, and contribute meaningfully to society.

HB2953 is a necessary step toward ensuring that special education is not an afterthought but a priority. By funding the staff and resources required to provide a true continuum of services, we are not only upholding our legal and ethical responsibilities but

also making a fiscally sound investment in Oregon's future. I urge you to support this bill and take a stand for the students who need it most.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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