

Tina Wagner
Special Education Teacher
Oregon CEC Board President
March 11, 2025

House Committee on Revenue
Oregon State Legislature

RE: Support for HB 2953 – Eliminating the 11% Cap on Special Education Funding

Dear Chair and Members of the House Committee on Revenue,

I am writing to express my strong support for HB 2953, which would remove Oregon's outdated 11% cap on special education funding. As a special education teacher in Salem-Keizer Public Schools, the second-largest district in Oregon, and as President of the Oregon Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), I have dedicated my career to ensuring that students with disabilities receive the education and resources they are entitled to. Additionally, through my advocacy work at the Special Education Legislative Summit (SELS) in Washington, D.C., I have engaged in national discussions about the urgent need for equitable special education funding.

The current 11% funding cap does not reflect the reality in Oregon's schools. Statewide, 14% of students require special education services, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). In Salem-Keizer Public Schools, the percentage is even higher—over 17% of students receive special education services, meaning that a significant portion of our special education programs are not receiving full state funding. As a result, Salem-Keizer is forced to allocate approximately \$100 million from general funds to cover special education services, despite an existing funding formula that should support these students. If the cap were removed, Salem-Keizer could receive an estimated additional \$20 million per biennium—funding that would directly support students with disabilities.

The original intent of the 11% cap was to prevent overidentification, but in practice, it has had the opposite effect—it incentivizes undercounting and delays proper identification of students who qualify for services. Instead of limiting funding, we should be supporting accurate identification to ensure every child receives the education and support they need to thrive.

HB 2953 is a necessary step toward educational equity. By eliminating the cap and requiring the Oregon Department of Education to track special education expenditures over time, this bill ensures transparency and accountability in funding distribution while allowing schools to meet the real needs of their students.

As someone who has worked in special education both in the classroom and as an advocate at the state and national levels, I urge you to support HB 2953 and ensure that Oregon schools, including large districts like Salem-Keizer, are funded based on actual student needs rather than an arbitrary formula limit.

Thank you for your time and commitment to this important issue.

Sincerely,

Tina Wagner
Special Education Teacher
Oregon CEC Board President