

House Committee on Education
Oregon State Senate
900 Court St. NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

RE: Support for House Bill 3444

Dear Chair Neron, Vice Chairs Dobson and McIntire, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Lindsay Freedman—proud parent of a wonderful 8-year-old daughter, parent ambassador for Alliance Charter Academy, and co-lead of Portland area support group for mother's of Autistic children.

Alliance Charter Academy has been life-changing for my daughter.

Our district public schools, quite frankly, are not equipped to adequately serve special education (SPED) students. When my daughter was ready for kindergarten, we began the IEP transition with our local school district. It quickly became clear that the rigid structure of the program would have been traumatic for her. At just five years old, she couldn't effectively communicate her experiences, and I knew she not only wouldn't be served within that system but she would like suffer trauma from sensory overwhelm, not being able to communicate her needs or be understood, and not having familiar, safe adults to offer co-regulation so that she could learn.

Through my work as a co-leader of a local support group for mothers of Autistic children, I have seen the devastating effects of these inadequacies on other families and continue to see many families drop out of traditional public schools and flock to our more flexible charter programs. With insufficient funding for SPED programs and a devastating focus on behavioral tactics and compliance, most traditional public schools lack the resources to support some Autistic children. Many face regular, traumatizing experiences that lead to severe burnout, and self-harm—forcing bright, capable kids out of school entirely, and often into mental health crisis. Many people assume that because of ADA, IDEA and 504

legislation all kids can receive an education at public school. This is not our truth or the truth of many other similarly situation families, however, who have fled traditional public education because of the traumatic environment for our children.

Because of its flexibility and commitment to diverse learning needs, Alliance Charter Academy has become a haven for students who don't thrive in traditional settings. As I understand it, 25% of Alliance students have a 504 or IEP plan. Despite serving as an unintended SPED magnet, Alliance receives less funding than district schools—putting these students at risk if adequate resources aren't secured. Parents, teachers, admins, and students work hard to create the supportive atmosphere that Alliance offers but the ongoing and heavy weight of additional needs must be met with support by our state government.

The funding shortfalls go beyond special education support. As I understand it, Alliance was unable to hire a foreign language teacher due to uncompetitive salaries, leaving a major gap in our K-12 program. Additionally, we lack the funding to provide essential resources like transportation, food, and technology—barriers that prevent many families from accessing the flexible education they desperately need.

At Alliance, my daughter has thrived socially in a way she never could have in a traditional school setting. The unique K-12 model allows her to form friendships, have a flexible schedule so we can balance her medical needs, therapy appointments, and also have access to academic and enrichment classes without having to miss parts of the day, be completely overwhelmed, and burnout. She can also have Mom present as an aide when she needs it. Alliance has a friendly and family focused atmosphere where older students help younger students instead of making fun of them. I recall during our first week at Alliance, my daughter the avid Minecraft lover, approached a group of 11th graders and was immediately welcomed and included. That kind of community is invaluable.

Through the support group for mothers, I also see the heartbreaking reality for families who don't have access to programs like Alliance. Many have been so traumatized by traditional public schools and their only option is virtual charter schools—a last resort that is also severely underfunded. Some of our most vulnerable children are being pushed out of brick and mortar public schools and moving to virtual and in person charters and those charters do not receive fair funding to support them. This is an educational crisis.

I have witnessed firsthand the profound impact of Alliance Charter Academy, and I believe every family deserves access to schools like it. These children need—and deserve—more than just 48 cents on the dollar.

Please support House Bill 3444 and ensure that public charter schools receive fair funding.

Thank you,

Proud Mama
Lindsay Freedman