

**Subject: Senate Bill 977 – A Step Toward Changing Lives for Students with IDD**

**Dear Chair Senator Frederick, Vice-Chair Senator Weber, and Members of the Senate Committee on Education:**

My name is Sara Hearing, and I am a student advisor at Portland State University's Career and Community Studies (CCS) program as well as a Master's of Social Work student. Oregon Senate Bill 977 is currently being sponsored by the Committee on Education, and I urge you to support this bill to continue to provide access to higher education for youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

I have been a student advisor at the CCS program since September 2024, and just in these few months, I have seen how important this program is for the students I advise. They find their passions in their classes, learn and seek career development opportunities for their futures, and engage in vital community inclusion activities just like all of their peers at the university.

Tragically, I have learned that the program is at risk for being shut down and having their funding cut. The passing of Oregon Senate Bill 977 would ensure that all of our current students can continue working hard to graduate and allow more students to join our program to reach their potential as well. I work as a Support Professional for United Cerebral Palsy of Oregon in Portland working with other adults with IDD, and I know many of my own clients would have benefited from this program when they were in school to have better work and education opportunities to support themselves throughout their adulthood. I hope that the passing of this bill will allow another option at PSU and other local community colleges for my future clients because of how this program opens doors, builds confidence, and fosters relationships for my current students I advise.

There is nowhere else currently in Oregon to attend higher education for youth with IDD. This bill would provide funding for more community colleges to create truly accessible programs for more youth with IDD. Without further funding to the CCS program, it is very possible that the

students I advise will not be able to graduate with the certificate they are working so hard to earn. Please consider supporting Oregon Senate Bill 977 this legislative session to support the only option they have at Portland State University to continue their education just as other able-bodied and neurotypical students do here and everywhere else.

Thank you for your hard work, time, and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sara Hearing

Portland State Masters of Social Work Student