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3/12/25

Dear Members of the Joint Subcommittee on Education,

I am writing to express my support for Senate Bill 5515, and to request your support as well. As a special education administrator, former Autism Consultant/Specialist, and current graduate student pursuing certification to teach students who are blind and visually impaired, I am urging you to support this SB 5515 in order to address the need for proper funding and service levels for students with autism, blindness/low-vision, and other low-incidence disabilities.

The current funding for Regional Inclusive Services has largely remained unchanged since 2009, when adjusted for inflation. At the same time, the population served by this program has grown by over 20%, which has strained our ability to provide adequate services. While our providers are exceptional and committed to offering top-notch service to their students, it is clear that the current funding level is unsustainable if we are to maintain the quality of services needed for these students in the long term. A reexamination of the funding structure and an evaluation of the most efficient ways to provide specialized services to this population across the state are essential.

In rural areas of Oregon, services from Regional Programs offered in public schools are often the only way students can access the specialized support, equipment, and services they need. Unlike metropolitan areas where private speech, occupational, physical, or ABA therapies are readily available, these services are either non-existent or hours away in rural areas. Regional Inclusive Programs are critical for ensuring that students across the entire state have access to equitable services tailored to their unique needs.

This bill is a step in the right direction for ensuring that these students receive the specialized support necessary to achieve meaningful inclusion in general education settings, meet their educational goals, and be prepared for life beyond school,

whether in higher education or the workforce.

I respectfully ask for your support of SB 5515 and thank you for your time and consideration.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tina Meier-Nowell". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned in the upper left quadrant of the page.

Tina Meier-Nowell, M.A.  
Coordinator, NWRESO ASD and School Psychology Teams