

To Whom it May Concern:

I am writing this testimony in support of Senate Bill 5515. I am a mother to a wonderful, smart and enthusiastic, autistic 5 year old boy. He has been receiving early intervention services since he was 2 years old. Without the guidance of my son's therapist's over the past couple of years, I honestly don't know where we would be as a family. These services have helped my son gain speech confidence, recognize and understand human emotions, social skills, coping skills, and overall a better life balance. My son's therapists have also provided myself and my husband with parenting skills and many different avenues and resources to try and help ourselves communicate with and educate our son. There have been times where his therapist's have seen me at my most vulnerable breaking points where I felt like a failure as a parent, and have given myself and my husband the reassurance that we are doing the right things by our son.

So many people dream of becoming parents, but no one really plans for their child to have a disability. It is simply something that happens, and you are thrown into a journey you were not prepared for. Further, you are up against an immense barrier with normal day to day society who are either not educated on Autism or simply lack the patience to be around it. It is heartbreaking. So you can imagine that as a parent to a child that could read by the age of 3, but lack the social skills for what our society deems "normal", to find out that special education funding was cut even more, it is a drastically demeaning and unfair decision for our child and all children with these kinds of disabilities.

If we need our children to carry on for us when we are gone, then we must do better by them now. Children should not be put on the back burner nor their programs funding cut at all. Especially special education. They deserve the same chances as everyone else in this country and I expect more from my state. Oregon needs to prioritize children in special education today and always.

I firmly and most passionately support this bill.

Sincerely,

Alicia Twitchell