

Good morning,

I am writing this testimony to encourage you and your fellow legislators to pass house bills 2448 and 2953. Both of these bills would increase funding for our most vulnerable students with the highest and non-negotiable needs in public education. Federal law requires us to provide support that facilitates access to a free and appropriate education. Additional funding would translate to appropriately meeting the needs of highly impacted students while increasing the quality of their support.

I have been a paraeducator in the Portland Metro area for almost 8 years. I have supported students with health needs such as seizure disorders, diabetes, mobility needs, toileting and feeding protocols, communication disorders, autism and adhd. I have changed the diapers of children who have high intelligence but lack the physical ability to control their bladder or bowels. I have assisted students to communicate just to access play with their peers. Every day I come home with a full heart for this work I am committed to but saddened by the heavy decisions licensed staff have to weigh every day in service to the education of our students. Supports like tool modifications, communication devices, transportation accommodations and support staff that help with feeding and toileting or allow for a student to work at their own pace can be the difference in a student coming to school or not.

As a mother to two children impacted by adhd and autism, I understand the amount of support required to meet their needs at home and at school. It takes creative problem solving, patience and empathy, flexibility and time. My work supporting students with high support needs has helped me understand that it takes all of that and much more. I have realized how infrequently we center these students during our education funding conversations and this needs to change. I have witnessed children with full support gain independence in their learning and it has changed their quality of life and confidence exponentially. It takes one tiny glimmer of connection, one aha moment, to understand the gravity and importance of doing right by these children. Passing these bills is the action we need to move our work forward. Thank you in advance, for helping educators support students.