

Submitter: Rachel Shuffield
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Revenue
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2953

Good afternoon,

My name is Rachel Shuffield and I am a significant needs education assistant in a life skills classroom. I work with students who receive the highest support in special education. Many of my students rely on our services for mobility throughout our building, hygiene, feeding protocols, social enrichment, fine motor assistance, among a myriad of other things. My students are some of the most resilient, intelligent, and kind people I know. I love my students and wish nothing more than their ability to function in a world that was not built with them in mind. I ask you to pass HB 2953.

The 11% allocation of special education funding is archaic and no longer serves our student population. We have several students with multiple complex disabilities who are not receiving one-on-one educational services due to budget constraints. They have so much potential, yet are not allowed to realize that due to the outdated budget constraints, which have not changed since 1991. Our students are often the first to be left out of general education instructional time due to staffing shortages. Substitutes are incredibly difficult to find in life skills. Many of our students are not taken to their general education classes at all throughout the week because the education assistant assigned to them is also assisting one or more other students. When they do go to class, their time is brief and feels so superficial. My students deserve an education driven by equity and excellence, not by us scraping together whatever bits of leftovers are available.

More often than not, a standard curriculum is not the norm in a life skills classroom. My students do not have the same access to texts, math resources, or social emotional learning that general education students do. Education assistants are expected to know what the standards are, what each student's IEP goals are, and adapt as necessary, even when we currently do not have access to trainings on how to adapt general education curricula.

In addition, every tool used in our classroom is hard won. It often takes weeks, if not months, to receive specialized equipment such as sensory tools, mobility aids, adaptive feeding tools, adaptive PE equipment, or communication devices. Several times this year, our teacher, myself, and other education assistants have purchased tools and curriculum with our own money. This is not sustainable or equitable.

Clearly, the 11% funding cap is not serving our students. Without access to a more robustly funded education, my students will be forced to continue the status quo of making do with leftovers. The current funding does not provide a meaningful, sustainable, equitable education for our most vulnerable students. The power to change that resides with you. I'm asking you to please pass HB 2953 so that all my

students can reach their full potential.