

Good afternoon, Chair Nathanson and members of the committee. My name is Brooke Schilling, and I am a special education teacher in the Medford School District located in southern Oregon. I am here today to testify in strong support of House Bill 2953.

As a special education teacher for the last 8 years, I have seen firsthand the challenges that our students with disabilities face every day. These students are diverse, with unique needs that require a wide range of resources and support to ensure they can succeed in the classroom. Special education is not a "one-size-fits-all" approach—it is a personalized, individualized system necessary for these students to thrive academically and socially.

However, the current cap on funding for special education services often creates barriers. It limits the resources available to our districts, making it harder to meet the needs of students with disabilities. As a result, many schools face difficult decisions about how to allocate limited resources, sometimes at the expense of the support these students desperately need. Removing this cap would allow us to better address the diverse needs of our students and ensure that every child receives the appropriate level of support.

At my school, we enrolled a student with a vision impairment who transferred from another district. Her Individualized Education Plan clearly stated that she needed a 1:1 aide to ensure she could fully participate in her education. Unfortunately, due to limited resources, our district was unable to provide that level of support. In order to meet her needs, and the legal requirements of her IEP, my principal and I worked together to piece together a plan, utilizing a combination of special education assistants and teachers, vision specialists from our local ESD, campus monitors and administrators to provide the necessary supervision and guidance throughout her 6.5 hour school day, Monday - Friday. While we made it work, this situation highlights the challenges we face when funding is inadequate.

Had there been more funding available to our district, we would have been able to provide this student with the dedicated support she required from the start. Instead, we had to rely on creative solutions that, while helpful, were not the ideal way to meet her needs.

In Medford, we have seen a growing number of students with varying disabilities, and the resources available to us have not kept pace with this increase. With more funding, we could hire additional specialists, provide more training for staff, and offer more individualized support for each student. This would not only improve the quality of education for students with disabilities but also help reduce the strain on our teachers and administrators who are working tirelessly to serve all students.

I urge you to support HB 2953. By removing the cap on funding, you are taking an important step toward ensuring that every student, regardless of ability, has the resources they need to succeed. Thank you.