

Mary Harvard
8950 N.E. Alberta St.
Portland, OR 97220
Voting District 23

March 15, 2025

Dear Chair Senator Frederick, Vice-Chair Senator Weber, and Members of the Senate Committee on Education:

My name is Mary Harvard and I am the mother of a student with an intellectual and developmental disability (IDD). I am writing to you in support of Senate Bill 977 to create college programs for youth with intellectual disability, sustaining Portland State University's (PSU) Career and Community Studies program (CCS), and expanding inclusive college options at community colleges across Oregon.

Senators, thank you for sponsoring SB 977. The Senate Committee on Education has an opportunity to change the lives of many Oregon youth with IDD by passing this bill.

As a parent of a child with IDD, I have spent years advocating for my child's right to learn, grow, and have the same opportunities as his peers. Regarding his journey through special education, he and I have spanned the gamut - public school, online school, homeschool and charter school - along the way building supports and a "Team Gabriel", always striving for his best quality of life, encouraging him to shine his gifts, believe in himself, and aim high with his dreams and goals.

However, I confess, when my son came home one day and announced to me that he wanted to go to college, I felt a twist in my stomach. Though I'd always held the bar high, I was realistic. I feared he'd end up disappointed and deflated, and I wasn't even sure such an opportunity existed for him.

I'd heard about the CCS program when it was a pilot program at PSU, and went to an informational meeting when Gabriel was still in high school. I was surprised to learn it was the only program of its kind in the State of Oregon; surprised because, as being immersed in the disability community, and knowing so many families like ours, it seemed the need for such a program was great, and so many young people like my son could benefit immensely. I was hopeful this program could thrive and expand so my son and many others could experience it. And, at the time, I was so grateful I had this option to bring home to my son - a college program for people like him. This gave him something to look forward to and strive for.

My son entered the CCS program in the Fall of 2023. CCS has provided tailored support, individualized modifications that empower him to participate in college classes and experience campus life. Through academic coaching and working with professors, the path is laid for

inclusion in coursework and in PSU campus activities. This kind of support benefits all the CCS students, and, as their teachers and classmates have attested, the PSU community at large.

The other important aspect of the program is helping students with career development and employment, recognizing their passions and dreams, honing in on their interests and goals, as well as building their skills, experience and confidence; and, upon completion of the program, putting them on a clearer path for lifelong employability and contribution to society. CCS has very high rates of post-program employment, which not only augurs well for my son, but also makes it a good economic investment for Oregon. My son and his CCS classmates will be contributing to our community. Senate Bill 977 is an investment not only in my son and students like him, but to all of Oregon.

Gabriel is currently in his second year in the CCS program, living on campus, and working at the University Market. He is singing in the University Choir, and is very excited to be taking a Psychology class next term. His growing independence has exceeded even my expectations, and opened many doors for his future.

I ask the Members of the Senate Committee on Education to vote yes on Senate Bill 977 in support of aspiring IDD college students, as an investment in Oregon, and so that more young adults like my son can experience this extraordinary educational opportunity.

Thank you for your time and service to the people of Oregon.

Sincerely,
Mary Harvard