

Submitter: Carina Lopez Mendoza
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee
On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB5515

Statement on the Chronic Underfunding of Early Intervention and Special Education

My name is Carina Lopez Mendoza, and I am a parent of two autistic children who rely on early intervention and special education services. I am here today to urge you to prioritize increased and sustained funding for these critical programs.

One year ago, my oldest daughter was diagnosed with autism. Like many families, we faced overwhelming challenges navigating services, long waitlists, and limited resources. Shortly after, my youngest daughter was also diagnosed, and while we were more prepared, we quickly saw the stark reality—early intervention and special education programs are severely underfunded, leaving children without timely and adequate support.

Research shows that early intervention is one of the most effective ways to improve developmental outcomes, yet many families, including my own, experience delays due to staffing shortages, high caseloads, and lack of funding. My youngest was able to access services much sooner than my oldest, and the difference has been profound. However, no family should have to struggle to access these essential services—every child deserves the best start possible, regardless of diagnosis or background.

The chronic underfunding of early intervention and special education has real consequences:

- Children miss critical developmental windows because they are left waiting for services.
- Educators and therapists are overburdened, leading to burnout and higher turnover.
- Families are forced to navigate complex systems alone, often with little guidance or support.

As a parent, I cannot stress enough the impact these programs have—not just on my children, but on entire communities. Investing in early intervention and special education is not just the right thing to do; it is a long-term investment in our children's futures. Without adequate funding, we are failing the very children who need support the most.

I urge you to take action: increase funding, expand access, and ensure that no child

falls through the cracks. Our children deserve better, and it starts with the decisions made here today.

Thank you for your time and commitment to our most vulnerable children.