

Submitter: Terri Shepherd

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee
On Education

Measure, Appointment or
Topic: SB5515

March 16, 2025

Representative Emerson Levy
900 Court St. NE, H-486, Salem, Oregon 97301

RE: Senate Bill 5515

Subject: Urgent Need for Increased Funding for Regional Inclusive Services in K-12
Special Education

Dear Representative Levy,

I am writing to urge your support to fully fund Regional Inclusive Services for K-12 Special Education in the upcoming budget. I am a parent of a 15 year old student in the Bend LaPine School District who receives Deaf/Hard of Hearing (DHH) support from the High Desert Education Service District (HDES).

If you're unfamiliar, HDES provides essential services for students with low-incidence disabilities in Central Oregon - including Autism, Deaf/Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind, Vision Impairment, TBI/Concussion, etc. However, as districts across Central Oregon face significant budget reductions, the ability to provide Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for our most vulnerable students is increasingly at risk.

I must re-iterate - these are the students who require the most specialized support. Early and regular intervention not only improves inclusion and belonging but radically improves outcomes later in life.

Regional Inclusive Services play a critical role in ensuring that students with disabilities receive the specialized support they need to thrive. These services provide direct support to school districts through expert consultation, professional development, assistive technology, behavioral and mental health support, and other resources essential for students' success. Yet, as districts are forced to cut and slash budgets, they are less able to meet the growing demand for special education services. Without additional funding, students with disabilities will face significant barriers to receiving the education they are legally and ethically entitled to.

The financial constraints on school districts mean they must rely more heavily on Regional Inclusive Services to fill critical gaps. We have experienced this personally. After years of advocating for my daughter, we needed to pay for many services privately (neuro psych testing, Occupational Therapy, Speech Therapy). Pediatric Hearing Aids alone cost over \$8,000. Without increased investment from the state, the ability to serve the most vulnerable students effectively will be severely impacted. By prioritizing funding for Regional Inclusive Services, you will help ensure that every student—regardless of ability—has access to the education and support they need to succeed.

I appreciate your leadership and commitment to ensuring all students receive a high-quality education. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this issue further and provide any additional information that would be helpful as you consider this urgent need.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to your support in ensuring that Oregon upholds its commitment to serving all students, including those with disabilities.

Sincerely,
Terri Shepherd
Bend, Oregon