

Submitter: Ann and Harry Esteve
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB977

Harry and Ann Esteve
1515 S.E. Miller St.
Portland, OR 97202
Senate District 21, House District 41

March 16, 2025

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

Our names are Harry and Ann Esteve, and we are the parents of Rachel Esteve, a young adult with Down syndrome. Down syndrome is a genetic disorder that affects physical and mental development. We are writing to you in support of Senate Bill 977 to create college programs for young adults with intellectual disabilities.

We write from the vantage point of grateful parents who saw Rachel graduate five years ago from the Community and Career Studies program at Portland State University. It felt like a leap when Rachel told us that she wanted to attend a four-year university program. She was 21 and had recently completed Portland Public Schools' Community Transition Program, where she learned job and transportation skills.

Even before Rachel was born, we were told she would likely never learn to read, and would be forever dependent on others. We have a vivid and disappointing memory of a meeting during which we were seeking educational services for Rachel and were told she might be denied them because she was "uneducable" — that is, based on her IQ the services would be wasted on her. Yet with the help of amazing teachers, counselors, and support services, she thrived in public schools.

During her four years at PSU, she studied race and social justice concepts, gender and family, art, literature and history. She snowshoed with the Outdoor Program, attended dances — enjoyed campus life. It wasn't long before we began to notice clear changes in Rachel. The sophistication of her writing and communication skills improved remarkably, as did her ability to think critically. Her self-confidence grew in everything from public speaking to getting around town by public transportation or ride-share.

Five years after graduating, Rachel has achieved all the goals she and her CCS team

set for her. With the help of a CCS-provided job coach, she found and has maintained a job as an assistant teacher at a neighborhood preschool. She continues to live independently in a cozy apartment with Lucy, a classmate in CCS. She performs modern dance in local theaters.

Her life stands as a testament to the value of people with disabilities being able to access an authentic college experience. Her experience also underscores the value to society of equipping people with disabilities with the skills and support to become full, tax-paying citizens. We are thrilled about the prospect of adding community colleges to the program, which would provide a wider choice of options for students considering enrollment.

Investing in the Community and Career Studies model for public universities and community colleges is a solid choice and correct for Oregon. The results are clear: education, independence and, at heart, happiness for those who might otherwise be denied.

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

Sincerely,

Harry and Ann Esteve