

# Letter of Support for Oregon Senate Bill 977

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03/16/2025

Dear Esteemed Senators of the Education Committee,

We are writing to express our strong support for Senate Bill 977, which would expand opportunities and support for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in higher education settings across Oregon.

Our family's personal experience demonstrates why this legislation is so critically important. Several years ago, we made the significant decision to relocate our entire family to Portland specifically so that our son, who is on the autism spectrum, could attend the Portland State University Career and Community Services program.

This fully integrated college program for students with IDD provided our son with an extraordinary opportunity that would have been impossible elsewhere. Over the course of four transformative years, he experienced:

- Full inclusion in campus life and academic courses alongside neurotypical peers
- Tailored support services that helped him navigate challenges while building independence
- Career development opportunities that connected his interests with genuine professional pathways
- Growth in social skills through natural college interactions and relationships
- Increased self-confidence and self-advocacy abilities

The impact of this program on our son's life trajectory cannot be overstated. It provided him with experiences, skills, and opportunities that simply would not have been available without such a thoughtfully designed program.

Senate Bill 977 would help create and strengthen similar programs throughout Oregon's higher education system, allowing many more families to access these life-changing opportunities without having to relocate as we did. Every person with IDD deserves the chance to participate meaningfully in higher education if they desire to do so.

The proposed investments in infrastructure, faculty training, and support services outlined in SB 977 represent a commitment to true inclusion and opportunity for all Oregonians. These programs don't just benefit the students with IDD who participate directly—they enrich entire campus communities by fostering diverse perspectives and authentic relationships.

I urge you to support this important legislation. Our family's experience is testament to the profound difference that well-supported, inclusive higher education programs can make in the lives of individuals with IDD and their families.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Kurt and Asya G. Beardsley