

March 26, 2025

Dear Co-Chairs Sollman and Ruiz and members of the committee,

Thank you for your service to Oregon's children. My name is Lisa McConachie, and I am proud to lead Columbia Regional Inclusive Services, which supports 6,000 students across 22 school districts and 4 EI/ECSE programs in four counties. We serve students with complex needs, including those with Autism, Traumatic Brain Injury, Orthopedic Impairments, Deaf/Hard of Hearing, Blind/Low Vision, and DeafBlind.

Statewide Regional Inclusive Services supports over 20,000 students, their families, and school district staff, ensuring that students can attend their neighborhood schools, stay within their local school districts, and access the general education curriculum. Without adequate funding for these services, these students will lose the opportunity to have an inclusive education in their own communities.

This is my 10th year as the director of our program, and my fifth time advocating for increased funding for Regional Inclusive Services. I'm hopeful that the fifth time delivers results, and that our plea for adequate funding will be realized. "The proposed funding, in its current form, threatens to deny blind students access to essential braille materials, leaving them without the tools to fully engage in their education. Deaf students would be deprived of critical amplification systems, making communication in the classroom impossible. Students with orthopedic impairments would go without the necessary equipment to support their mobility and independence, while students with Autism would not receive the vital interventions and supports they need to thrive in a general education environment. This funding proposal risks undermining the educational rights and opportunities of our most vulnerable students."

The proposed \$69 million allocation is woefully inadequate. Last year, this body passed SB 53 to assess what constitutes adequate funding for regional inclusive services, the outcome was a recommendation for \$122 million. While I understand this bill covers numerous programs, I urge you to prioritize Regional Inclusive Services this year by increasing funding by \$50 million.

Some of you may have met our students. During the pandemic, you heard our student Miracle read *Harry Potter* in Braille with her English accent. Since then, she has become part of the Oregon Battle of the Books Team at Walt Morey Middle School. Last year the team competed at the state championship and took THIRD PLACE! Miracle is blind, she participates using Braille books and with the support of her teacher for the visually impaired. Unfortunately, this kind of support is at risk without adequate funding.

One parent shared:

"Having a child with special needs is by no means cheap or easy. But having a program that believes in your child, that gives them the opportunity to communicate and interact with the world, providing specialized equipment, resources, and teachers to help them stay in their homes or schools safely—that is irreplaceable. Cutting this program is cutting services for some of the most vulnerable and deserving children in Oregon."

Thank you for your service, time, and consideration.