

Submitter: Amanda Maxwell  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee  
On Education  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB5515

Subject: Urgent Need to Amend SB 5515 and Fully Fund EI/ECSE Services for Oregon Families

I am writing to urge you to amend Senate Bill 5515 to allocate \$432.8 million for Oregon's Early Intervention (EI) and Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) programs. This funding is crucial to addressing the growing demand for these services and ensuring every child in Oregon receives the support they need during their most critical years of development.

Early intervention and special education services have a profound impact on children and families. Research consistently shows that timely support for young children with developmental delays or disabilities leads to better long-term educational, social, and economic outcomes. Yet, due to limited funding, thousands of children in Oregon are being placed on waitlists or receiving reduced services—placing unnecessary burdens on families and limiting their children's potential.

Short personal story:

When my daughter was born, her disability was not immediately apparent. As she missed developmental milestones, a series of specialists eventually determined she was severely disabled by the time she was eight months old. At that point, we were placed in Clackamas's Early Intervention (EI) program.

As a family, we knew nothing about disability. I attribute this to how services operated when I was growing up in Clackamas County in the 1990s—disabled children were not included in general education classrooms. As a result, I had never even seen a disabled child, and now I was raising one.

Fortunately, we were assigned an incredible EI specialist from North Clackamas named Kathy. She and her team supported us every step of the way, guiding us through what to expect and providing access to toys and assistive devices we didn't even know existed. My daughter has a rare disease where her mind is fully active, but she is trapped in a body that does not respond. Kathy not only equipped us with the tools we needed but also provided crucial emotional support. By the time my daughter aged out of the EI program at three years old, she had an eye-gaze communication system in place, and we had the confidence to move forward. Without the Early Intervention program, we would have been completely lost.

Then came the challenge of preschool. Every program in Clackamas County turned us away, citing various reasons—even church programs. Recognizing the gap in services, North Clackamas piloted a preschool program that included five children on

Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) alongside ten typically developing peers. They even provided bus transportation. I couldn't imagine what this would look like—my completely non-mobile, non-verbal, seizures, medically complex child in a classroom. I had no idea what to expect, but I put her on the bus and hoped for the best.

The program, led by an incredible teacher named Amy and supported by up to four paraprofessionals, exceeded my expectations. When I visited the classroom, I saw communication tools like AAC-style pictures in use, and I watched my daughter being fully included. Seeing Amy's vision come to life reassured me that my daughter belonged in a classroom setting.

As a result, the pilot program was a tremendous success. It gave us the confidence to keep our daughter in school. Not only is she still in school this year, but she is now integrated into Ardenwald Elementary's general education program—the first student with her level of needs to do so at the school. She is in a classroom with 27 typical peers, and because of this access and support, we are uncovering her true potential. PLEASE do not cut this program. Instead, continue to expand it! My family is just one of many that could have life-changing, positive, and inclusive experiences.

I urge you to amend SB 5515 and ensure that all children in Oregon, regardless of ability, have the resources they need to thrive. Thank you for your leadership and dedication to Oregon's future.

Sincerely, Amanda