

4/18/25

RE: Strong Support for SB 868 – Sustainable Funding for Regional Inclusive Services

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

As the members of the statewide Autism Spectrum Disorder Professional Learning Team, we are made up of administrators and Autism Consultants/Specialists from all 8 regions of the state who administer services for students with Autism from birth through 21 in public schools. We are reaching out to ask for your support of SB 868.

Senate Bill 868, addresses the urgent need for a sustainable and equitable funding model for Oregon's Regional Inclusive Services (RIS). As specialists working with students with autism from birth -21, we believe this bill is essential to ensuring that students with low-incidence, high-cost disabilities receive the services and support they deserve in a stable and predictable way.

Since 1982, RIS has been a lifeline for students across Oregon, providing critical services for students with autism as well as serving unique special education needs such as audiology, vision support, sign language interpretation, and specialized instruction for low-incidence disabilities. However, the funding model has not kept pace with rising student needs or the true cost of service delivery. From 2009 to 2023, the number of students served by RIS increased by 40%, yet funding per student has not reflected that growth.

SB 868 offers a clear path forward by:

- Establishing a reliable funding formula that reflects actual service costs.
- Accounting for regional cost differences and increasing student populations.
- Providing stability that enables the recruitment and retention of qualified professionals.

This bill builds on the findings of Senate Bill 53 (2021) and recommendations from the ODE-convened task force. It addresses long-standing inequities and inefficiencies that compromise the quality and consistency of services for students with disabilities—particularly in rural and underserved areas.

Our students deserve better than a system that relies on outdated formulas and unstable discretionary funds that result in great shifts in service levels and losses of highly-trained staff when there are large swings in funding levels. SB 868 recognizes that inclusive education is not only a moral imperative—it is a legal obligation and an investment in our shared future.

We urge you to support SB 868 and ensure Oregon fulfills its commitment to all students,

regardless of ability or zip code.

Thank you for your leadership and attention to this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Kris Hudson & Christina Thompson - Autism Consultant

Jennifer Meehan, M. Ed.: MSc ASD, Autism Specialist/Evaluator

Tina Meier-Nowell, M.A.

Coordinator of NWRES D's ASD and School Psychology Teams

Amy Szeliga, M. Ed.; BCBA

SOESD Regional Autism Consultant

