

Testimony in Support of Full Funding for SB 538

Submitted by Lisa R. Ledson

Co-Chairs Lieber and Sanchez, and Members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means,

Thank you for your continued work to develop a responsible and balanced budget that protects Oregon's most vulnerable residents. I am writing today in strong support of fully funding **SB 538**, a critical bill that ensures the highest-need children with disabilities—those requiring both nursing-level medical care and intensive behavioral support—can receive the services they need to survive, learn, and thrive.

As a registered nurse, a grassroots advocate, and the mother of a child with profound medical and developmental disabilities, I know firsthand that there is a small but significant population of children who fall through the cracks of our current service systems. These children, like my daughter Hannah, live with overlapping needs: she is nonverbal, uses a wheelchair, experiences intractable epilepsy, relies on a feeding tube for all nutrition and hydration, and requires skilled care to prevent aspiration. She also has complex behavioral support needs that require high-level supervision and de-escalation planning.

Our current Medicaid structure often separates medical care and behavioral health into silos—leaving children like Hannah without access to coordinated care. SB 538 bridges that gap by allowing for funding and service planning that reflects the real-world complexity of these children's lives. These are not hypothetical needs; they are urgent, daily realities.

Fully funding SB 538 aligns directly with the budget priorities outlined in the 2025–27 budget framework:

- **Protecting Core Services:** SB 538 strengthens our commitment to core, life-sustaining services that keep children safe in their homes and schools, avoiding costly hospitalizations and residential placements.
- **Getting the Most for Every Dollar:** By investing in appropriate in-home and community supports, Oregon can avoid far more expensive crisis interventions, institutional placements, and long-term health complications.
- **Mitigating Uncertainty:** Families with medically fragile children live in constant uncertainty. This bill gives them a framework of consistent support that prevents preventable emergencies.
- **Prioritizing Investments in Key Areas:** SB 538 directly supports Oregon's most critical values: **health, safety, and equity** for those who have been historically underserved and often overlooked.

These children are not new. Their needs are not going away. But what we do have now is an opportunity to acknowledge their humanity and meet their needs with dignity, efficiency, and foresight. Fully funding SB 538 is not the creation of a new program—it is the correction of a systemic oversight.

I urge you to make this targeted investment in children like Hannah. It is both fiscally wise and morally necessary.

Thank you for your time and your service to Oregon's families.

Sincerely,

Lisa R. Ledson

Mother to Hannah, age 12