

Submitter: Rob Fields  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB5006

To whom it may concern,  
I am writing you to submit testimony for my 100% support of family networks.

After our second son was born, it didn't take long to notice that he was developing at a different pace as our first. Although he was physically developing at a normal pace, he was not hitting all of the intellectual milestones at typical times. At around age 1-2 years old, our Dr had asked if we had anyone with autism in the family but that's all that was communicated at the time, so we kind of dismissed it. There was no other professional advice or follow up questions. Months went by and we noticed more and more the delays with intellectual growth, we then started to reach out to friends and the community for answers or advice. Through those non professional conversations we were introduced to our local family network, and with that we were introduced to a wide range of information, resources, and most importantly peers that were experiencing and navigating a society that was not created or in some cases not accepting or inclusive for our son.

Fortunately for us, we found our local family network "Bridging Communities". Through them we were introduced to resources and families that encouraged and inspired us to reach out within our community for inclusion.

We were introduced to Developmental Disability Services, where we were able to enter an early intervention program. In addition, in parallel, through those peer connections we found a typical inclusive preschool that we were able to attend leading up to his kindergarten year. This early attention helped us not only prepare for school, but was critical prevention for him not to fall further behind. Through Bridging Communities (our family network) we were introduced to Fact Oregon, an organization that specializes in special education and individual education plans (IEP). This was a critical part of our son's success in the public school system. I don't want this to come off as there were no struggles, because the struggle is real!

However, the struggle is not with my son, but the created structure that surrounds us. Schools are taught to segregate students that don't fit into a typical mold. I find this is not a good practice to be taught so early, because when these students are grown, they will then be forced to navigate a society that is not accepting or inclusive. With his IEP in place, we were able to keep him in a typical classroom where he participated in the same educational process as his typically developing peers. In this setting he has developed long standing friendships and has access to a typical inclusive education. Fast forward a few years with the support of our family network, accessible resources, and valuable peer support. My son is attending a typical middle school where he just recently was awarded the student of the month award for his outstanding performance. I know this has only been possible with the help of our

local family network and their vast knowledge, support, and willingness to help. Bridging Communities has not only changed my sons life and set him up for success, but has provided us as a family with the tools and knowledge to help others and make our community/world a more inclusive understanding place. Although I feel we are a success story for family networks, the world has not caught up to the progressive thinking and unfortunately is not always inclusive.

I feel that family networks have been critical in our son's success and our family's understanding and inclusive values. This world is for us all! And without the family networks I'm not sure I would have that attitude. Family networks have not only changed our lives, but gave us the knowledge to look at our selves and surrounding areas to help make improvements to make our world accessible for everyone.

With that said, Please support our family networks anyway you can.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Rob Fields