



Disability
Rights
Oregon

February 5, 2026

Oregon State Legislature Senate Early Childhood and Behavioral Health Committee

900 Court Street NE Salem, OR 97301

Submitted electronically via OLIS

Chair Reynolds, Vice Chair Anderson and members of the committee,

My name is Coleen Carey. I am an advocate with Disability Rights Oregon and proud member of the Community Advisory Board for the UO Ballmer Institute. Most importantly, I am the mom of a 20-year-old daughter who experiences intellectual and developmental disability (I/DD). I write in strong support of SB1547, as this bill is personal to my family.

Last year, our daughter was violently assaulted and injured by a fellow student at her high school in NE Portland. The student that attacked her also experiences disability. We'd known since first grade, and he has always been gentle and kind to her. Which is why one of the first questions I asked the school staff was, "Is it possible he was in a mental health crisis? Is he getting help?"

I was met with blank stares.

The young boy's mental health wasn't considered by school staff. Why? Because he has autism. Following traditional stereotypes, the assumption was it *had* to be the autism that caused him to be violent to a girl he'd known for years and considered a friend.

There aren't enough professionals in our schools that understand the critical intersection between I/DD and mental health. Children with learning disabilities are **4.5 times more likely** to have mental health challenges than those without as factors such as frustration, social anxiety and bullying contribute to depression, anxiety, OCD and more.

The Ballmer Institute's model builds an army of bachelor's-level professionals trained in early identification of mental health issues, prevention, skills development, so that master's level and PhDs can focus on diagnosis and treatment for kids with the most complex needs. I am proud to say that this year, the Ballmer Institute's curriculum will include a required course on supporting the behavioral health needs of youth who are neurodivergent and/or experience disabilities.

SB1547 provides a licensing credential helps us attract the best talent to Oregon to serve our most vulnerable children with co-occurring I/DD and mental health conditions.

I urge you to support SB1547.

Respectfully,

Coleen Carey, Advocate for Disability Rights Oregon

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Disability Rights Oregon is the Protection and Advocacy System for Oregon