

Hello,

I am here to speak for House Bill 2895. My name is Ginger Huizar. I am a disabled woman. I am a mom who has raised a neuro-diverse child. And, I am a full time special education teacher at Portland Public Schools. I am here because we are in a state of crisis. The needs of our students are outpacing the local capacity to be met and I know this because I spend many unpaid hours trying to find ways to address our student's needs. At the local level I sit on my school's instructional leadership team, climate team and school intervention team. I sit on the district's Special Education Steering Committee. I sit on my union's executive board. So I am here to ask for state change, to help us better meet the needs of our students at each local level. They are our future Oregonians.

HB 2895 proposes to remove the cap on the amount of money distributed from the State School Fund to school districts for students receiving special education. It also provides an additional weighted amount towards students who are experiencing housing insecurity. Which we have seen disproportionately is impacting families who have children with disabilities.

Why are we needing this cap increased?

In 1991 the State School Fund created a double weighting formula for students in Special Education because the legal requirements to serve students with special needs is more costly. In 1991 the cap for Special Education was 11%. Today, 32 years later the cap is still 11%. The number of school aged students receiving special education in Oregon has increased over the years. The state average who receive Special Education has grown by over 20,000 students a year (1993 was 55,014 and in 2021 was 79,782) and stands at 14%. In Portland Public Schools it is 17% and rising with an estimation that 1 in 5 students will have an IEP.

In the only major metropolitan area in this state, the cost of living is estimated to be 133.7% of the national average, making it one of the most expensive cities in the country. An important aspect of HB 2895 is the weighted formula added for students in Special Education who are also experiencing housing insecurity.

I was born and raised in Oregon. Growing up my mom was a single mother who worked odd jobs as a maid or nights at a gas station, so that she could also care for my brother who has developmental delays and was legally blind. We were often homeless and fed from church food boxes and free lunch programs. I dropped out at 15 to work full time. As a young mother I repeated this cycle until I started community college. I understand

the challenges that our students and families are experiencing because I am a product of our system. It is dehumanizing to be the mother who can not feed or house her children. It is dehumanizing to be the mother advocating for support for her child with disabilities. It takes a toll on our children when our systems fail to meet their needs, which is probably an influencing factor to the generational cycle of poverty. It is estimated that over 70% of inmates are illiterate. In Oregon prisons, over 50% of inmates have been diagnosed with a developmental delay or mental illness. The systems feed one another. And we are feeding our babies to the state.

From parent volunteers, to community agents, to district programs, we work to insulate our schools with as much support as we can maximize out of each dollar spent.

Teachers take on the trauma and the triumphs of their students, identifying every skill, every deficit, every need, with growing caseloads and class sizes. In Special Education we are tasked with greater needs. Our students can struggle with safety, mental and emotional health needs and behaviors, physical barriers, life skills, and academic deficits. For some, all of these are rolled into one single human. And, in many schools, it is one person, such as myself, working to support 30 children with varying levels of need in our classrooms. Each year, because of the increased needs and the lack of funding and trained staff, we are struggling to stretch resources further with less. Resulting in our most marginalized students who bear the brunt of yet another systemic failure and more specialists choosing to leave the profession.

Please, I implore you, to hear our words. To understand that the Oregon dollar went a lot further in 1991 than it does in 2023. And if there is going to be any change to better address the needs of Special Education in Oregon, it has to be a change that happens at both state and federal levels.

Thank you,

Ginger Huizar, M.Ed, SpEd