

Submitter: Debra Jablonski

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Education

Measure: HB2895

I am a speech language pathologist in Portland Public Schools. I want to submit support of this bill as it directly impacts my ability to identify and serve kids with communication struggles in school. I have been at a school that is woefully understaffed and has very high needs. The cap in this bill affects how PPS staffs my position and that directly impacts the amount of time and quality of the interventions I provide for students. With a caseload cap at 50 students in a school with 3 separate programs my time and ability is spread very thin. I have 65 students on my caseload (15 over my limit, and 25 of which are in ISC classrooms - meaning their communication needs are MUCH higher than a gen ed kid) currently and another 5 in evaluation. I am way beyond a workload that any one person can possibly perform alone and yet PPS does not provide extra FTE support due to a cap in funding. Post COVID the world and especially our schools have changed. Needs are higher than ever and staffing is worse than ever due to burn-out, poor compensation and lack of support, all of which relate directly to the cap on funding for SPED. My job is impossible and I spent a lot of time feeling like a failure as a result of the lack of funding to staff and support properly. The violence, behaviors, social-emotional needs, and need for direct academic support are only increasing but there is nothing to back up these needs. The longer we continue to not properly fund SPED the more teachers and specialists will continue to leave. I have worked in Seattle public schools, San Francisco public schools and New Mexico public schools - and there has never been this level of burn-out, lack of support or factually children not getting their minutes or even basic needs met bc of a woefully underfunded program. The children get the worst part of this all as so many classrooms are now staffed by untrained paras and subs due to lack of proper training, pay scale, ability to retain and support staff. Both as a parent and an employee of Portland Public Schools I feel like SPED is failing in a huge way right now and this funding cap is the genesis of many many problems that are being ignored daily.