

March 21, 2013

To: Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services

From: Janine Paschal

Re: SB 5529

Co-Chairs Bates and Nathanson and Members of the Committee,

My name is Janine Paschal; I am a resident of Clackamas County and the parent of a young child with a developmental disability. I am writing today on behalf of our family in support of our local family support network and Clackamas County DHS.

Our daughter Anna is a friendly, energetic kindergartner who loves being with people and takes great pride in accomplishing tasks independently. Anna thrives on routine and is a good student when she knows what is expected of her and is given transition warnings. She is excited to go to school every day.

This school year, Anna had the good fortune to have a well-trained instructional assistant providing support to her in a general education classroom at our neighborhood school. With this support in place, she was showing marked progress toward her IEP goals. Last month, the school district made a personnel change that directly resulted in behavioral regression for Anna as she struggled with maintaining consistency and managing the transition to a new instructional assistant.

Ultimately, the situation escalated to an incident where our daughter left the school building undetected even while there were 3 adults in the classroom and there was awareness of her recent behavior. Anna was found on the school playground and was asked to stop running. She did not stop, and a staff member did not reach her until she was chest deep in a pond in the wetlands on school

property. Imagine our relief that she did not sustain serious injury in this incident. Now imagine our dismay when the school district response to the incident was to suspend our daughter from school.

Even as we questioned how this incident could have happened with support identified in her IEP and a safety plan in place, we sought guidance with regard to what our best course of action would be in dealing with the school district and helping our daughter adjust to the transition. The first places that I turned were to local family support networks and our DHS case manager.

The family support networks were key in pointing me to resources that proved to be very helpful.

Engaging in conversation with people outside the school district was invaluable as we had questions that we needed to have answered from a parent perspective and not from the view of district employees.

Receiving this support enabled us to go into meetings with school district personnel armed with positive suggestions for supporting our daughter.

During this time, I also contacted our daughter's case manager at DHS, who has been a staunch advocate for Anna as we work to have her included in community activities and our neighborhood school. She was able to connect me with a good resource specializing in behavior support. She also attended school meetings and provided an objective point of view both during meetings and in private follow-up conversations.

In summary, I strongly support funding for developmental disability programs and family support networks. In our recent experience, and as situations have arisen in the past, we have repeatedly turned to both of these resources for guidance in being the best advocates for our child that we can be.

Children with developmental disabilities do not come with an instruction manual any more than

neurotypical children do, and there has to be a place that we can turn to for support and to draw on experiences of other families in similar situations.

Thank you for your consideration. I would be happy to answer questions.

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