



**TESTIMONY
DHS WAYS AND MEANS
SUB-COMMITTEE HEARING**

Noelle Sisk
319 SW Sutherland Way
Aloha, OR 97006

noelle@factoregon.org

503.521.6907

My name is Noelle Sisk and I am from Hillsboro, Oregon.

I am the single mom of 3 children- 9,4 and 2. My oldest daughter Olivia experiences multiple disabilities including an intellectual disability. My first experience with motherhood was "normal" until week 20 in my pregnancy when on my ultra sound to find out she was a beautiful girl we also found out she had brain abnormalities. The fear of the unknown was paralyzing. After having Olivia I struggled with isolation because of the medical needs that she required. And while well meaning and loving people helped me and loved me- it was more than most knew how to handle.

Instead of playdates and Gymboree classes- I was at the hospital seeing specialists plus multiple therapy appointments every week. The energy, financial stress and emotional upheaval of this time was devastating.

We struggled with inclusion from the time she was born- in church and multiple denials from community preschools.

And then when Livy was 5 I went to my community public school in Hillsboro, Oregon- so excited to register my daughter for kindergarten and was told no. I was told by the secretary Olivia would need to go to a different school. This was so upsetting. It was devastating to my family as well as the idea that anyone thought it was ok to discriminate in that way.

After realizing what I was going to have to do just to make sure my daughter had access to the same education as her typically developing peers. And what I was going to have to do in order for her to just have citizenship in her local public school, I attended a FACT Family Network parent training. I met other moms who had the same vision for their children as I did and those women are still and will always be the core of my support network. I accessed all types of formal supports and never received the tools I needed to advocate for Olivia- My family network provided me the tools and the parent to parent relationship was so empowering. Had I not had this type of support I would have allowed Olivia's school to segregate her into a special ed classroom in kindergarten. But with the support I received from my family Network I was able to advocate for the regular classroom placement with supports IN the class. She is still in that placement in the school that originally told us

no- thriving in the second grade. Because of the relationships I've made *and tools I have received I have such a different vision for Olivia than* what was originally painted in the medical model or formal support world. I now have the vision to see her graduating with a diploma, being employed and living independently in her community.

The ongoing support and education I get from being involved with my family network gives me the support to continue this journey. I will never not be Olivia's mom and she will never not be affected by disability, but because of the relationships with other parents in my same situation I *feel I can always do this. I now work for the FACT Family Network, one of the four family networks in Oregon currently funded by DHS. I am so honored to be able to give back what I have received. I am in contact with hundreds of families and see firsthand that empowered families*

raise empow-
ered children
which in turn
builds stronger
communities!

