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MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 6, 2017
TO: House Committee on Early Childhood and Family Supports
FROM: Ava Bartley, FACT Oregon
RE: Support for HB 2957

Chair Lively, Vice Chairs Hack and Piluso, and Members of the House Committee on Early Childhood and Family Supports:

My name is Ava Bartley, and I am the Advocacy and Engagement Director for FACT Oregon. I am writing to provide testimony in support of **HB 2957**, which establishes a grant program for the purpose of improving kindergarten student-to-teacher ratios in schools that are considered high poverty.

FACT Oregon's mission is to empower Oregon families experiencing disability in pursuit of whole lives in their community. The outcome of our work is families with high expectations for their child and a vision for the future where all communities are accessible, welcoming, and embrace that disability is natural.

Since 2012, FACT Oregon has been Oregon's parent training and information center (PTI) through a grant from the US Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs. Through services created "by families for families," we have helped thousands of families each year navigate barriers, create a culture of inclusion, and demonstrate that a whole life is possible. We do this through in-person trainings, educational conferences, webinars, and support through our statewide helpline via phone and email.

We support the goal of HB 2957 to improve kindergarten student-to-teacher ratios. As you know, there is a large body of research that shows that lower student-to-teacher ratios, especially for younger learners, will boost the success of all students and will have lasting effects on success later in life.

Empower Oregon families experiencing disability in their pursuit of a whole life by expanding awareness, growing community, and equipping families.

Through our work supporting Oregon families whose children experience disability, we have seen an intersectionality of disability and poverty. Studies show that the proportion of low-income families who have a child with a disability is higher than the rate among higher income families.¹

It would be wonderful if we could have low student-to-teacher ratios in all kindergarten classrooms, but given limited resources it seems appropriate to initially target the additional resources being made available through this bill at schools with a high proportion of students living in poverty, which will also likely have a higher proportion of students experiencing disability.

Students in poverty who experience disability have additional barriers to overcome in accessing their free appropriate public education and becoming life-long learners. Lower student-to-teacher ratios will increase the likelihood that kindergarten teachers will be able to better serve students experiencing disability in the general education classroom setting with the proper services and supports, which data shows will result in higher graduation rates for these students. Including students with disabilities in the general education classroom benefits all children and creates inclusive school communities that value diversity and have high expectations for all students.

We encourage you to invest in our young learners by passing HB 2957. Thank you for your service to our state and for your support of Oregon children experiencing disability.

¹ “Sixteen percent of low-income families (families earning less than 200 percent of poverty) have a child with a disability; 9 percent have a child with a severe disability. This is nearly 50 percent higher than the rate among higher-income families. The percentage is particularly high among welfare families—20 percent of these families have a child with a disability, including 13 percent where a child has a severe disability.” Children’s Defense Fund publication: *Children with Disabilities and Other Special Needs: Opportunities to Participate in Quality Programs Must Be Expanded*, 2003, citing S. Lee, M. Sills, and G. Oh. (June 20, 2002). *Disabilities among Children and Mothers in Low-Income Families (Research in Brief, IWPR Publication #D449)*. Washington, DC: Institute for Women’s Policy Research. The study analyzed data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation collected in 1997.