



**PRESENTATION TO SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
Oregon Legislative Assembly**

Tuesday, April 25, 2017
Committee Session is 3:00 – 5:00 pm
Hearing Room C

GUEST PRESENTERS:

- **Governor Barbara Roberts**, former Governor of Oregon, Secretary of State and House Representative; Current Board Member, Special Olympics Oregon
- **Kerry Tymchuk**, Executive Director, Oregon Historical Society, former Board Chair, Special Olympics Oregon; current Board Member, Special Olympics Oregon
- **Margie Hunt**, Chief Executive Officer, Special Olympics Oregon

OPENING REMARKS: GOVERNOR BARBARA ROBERTS

"Chair Roblan, Members of the Committee, my name is Governor Barbara Roberts and I am an enthusiastic member of the Board of Directors of Special Olympics Oregon.

We are very grateful for this opportunity to speak to the Senate Education Committee today about Special Olympics Oregon, an organization that is profoundly impacting children and youth – both with and *without* disabilities – in Oregon's schools.

Let me first thank you for your public service. Legislative service is not easy. I've been in your shoes and I have not forgotten. Budget challenges and competing interests over short dollars are a constant pressure. But we need good people in government and I appreciate you stepping forward very much.

Now, I do not come to Salem to testify in a committee meeting very often. I would not be here if this were a minor matter. I am here today because I know the critical importance of the issue we're discussing, I know what it means to the quality of life for tens of thousands of children and youth in Oregon's schools, and I know what it means to our entire education system.

In the next few minutes, you will hear about one of the best-kept secrets in this state: the work of Special Olympics Oregon. You know the brand – everyone does – but today you will learn why this organization is one of the most significant partners this state has, and how Special Olympics is helping Oregon meet major government directives and mandates. The fact is, Special Olympics Oregon has stepped up for several years and assumed a leadership role in response to these government mandates. Now we are asking for your help.

We'd like to begin by providing some important general background for you. Kerry?

REMARKS: KERRY TYMCHUK

Chair Roblan, Members of the Committee, my name is Kerry Tymchuk and I am the Executive Director of the Oregon Historical Society. In addition, I've just completed four terms as Board Chair of Special Olympics Oregon and am continuing as an active member of the Board of Directors.

I join with Governor Roberts in thanking you for your public service and support you in creating a better Oregon for all. That takes teamwork, collaboration and partnerships – and we come to you today in that very capacity: as partners.

Let me first provide some general background for you on Special Olympics Oregon:

- Special Olympics Oregon serves the **largest disability population in the state:** individuals with intellectual disabilities, medically referred to as *mentalretardation*. This is also the largest disability population in *any* state and includes a wide range of causes and degrees of disability, including significant autism. Many of our participants also have physical disability.
- Currently, Special Olympics Oregon has **over 14,000 participants statewide of all ages**, with an estimated 100,000 or more who could benefit from our programs. Over the last 10 years, we have had 983% growth in our participation level.
- Special Olympics Oregon's programs are **statewide** and **year-round** – every day, every week, every month, every year. On any given day, except major holidays, there are Special Olympics activities underway all over this state.
- More than **1 in 8 Oregon students receive special education services** in the state's schools, a fact very familiar to those of you who are educators. And we have a very successful partnership **with hundreds of Oregon's schools**, which we'll tell you more about. In fact, more than two-thirds of participants join Special Olympics through a school-based program.

At the beginning of my remarks, I said that we come to you as "partners." Partnerships are the foundation of our success. Former Governor Tom McCall said: "Heroes are not giant statues framed against a red sky. They are people who say: This is my community, and it is my responsibility to make it better."

Special Olympics Oregon has the privilege of partnering with the very kind of heroes Governor McCall describes. We have amazing Oregon partners:

- To serve our mission, we rely on **thousands of volunteers** all over the state, nearly 7000 every year. We do not pay them because they don't deserve it, but because they are priceless. Without them, we simply could not do what we do.

- In 30 Oregon counties, we provide our services through trained **Volunteer Leadership Teams** – amazing Oregonians who give of their time, talent and *heart* to serve our constituency year-round in their communities and schools.
- We have a major partnership with hundreds of Oregon’s schools – through our **Unified Champion Schools** initiative. This includes Unified Sports®, where students with and without disabilities are partners on sports teams and in health and wellness programs. It also includes our **Respect Campaign**, which is creating a culture of respect in many Oregon schools. And these programs are funded by Special Olympics Oregon.
- We have a long-standing partnership with **Oregon’s Law Enforcement Community** under the banner “Law Enforcement Torch Run.” These officers serve as a key volunteer partner to Special Olympics Oregon activities statewide.
- We partner with the families of our participants through an organized **Family Network**, providing an ongoing source for the sharing of information, support and counsel family-to-family.
- We are partnered with Oregon State University through our **Oregon Team Wellness** initiative, which provides a unique curriculum in health and fitness developed by Special Olympics Oregon that teaches our constituency how to take care of themselves in their daily lives. This program has garnered national attention and has now been launched by four other states.

Special Olympics Oregon is currently funded through the private sector, specifically, foundations, corporate sponsors and individual donors. Our annual budget is approximately \$8.8 million, with additional in-kind support also significant.

We partner in every way possible with many of Oregon’s business and community leaders in raising the critical dollars to bring our programs to the thousands with intellectual disabilities whose lives are changed and made better because of Special Olympics.

As you might guess, the impact of Special Olympics Oregon is deep, wide, diverse and measurable.

Margie – talk to us more about Special Olympics Oregon’s impact.

REMARKS: MARGIE HUNT

Chair Roblan, Members of the Committee, my name is Margie Hunt and I am the CEO of Special Olympics Oregon. I have the privilege of sharing information about the impact of Special Olympics Oregon with you.

There’s solid empirical evidence on the overarching impact:

- Special Olympics has a powerful impact on the wider community by **changing public attitudes towards people with intellectual disabilities**. For example, studies have shown that support for inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities in regular classrooms increased from 2% to 55% as people became more involved with Special Olympics.
- Special Olympics **leads to greater opportunities for employment for those with intellectual disabilities**: 52% of adult Special Olympics participants in the United States are employed. For adult individuals in the general population with intellectual disabilities who are *not* in Special Olympics, the percentage is just 34% or lower.
- And in the broadest sense, Special Olympics Oregon is impacting the very economy of our communities. Our programs focus on the development of **"tools for life,"** which lead to the following improved personal development:
 - Increased social and communication skills; 90% of participant's family members report improvement in relationship skills and friendships.
 - Increased self-esteem and confidence
 - Increased motor skills
 - Improved cognitive skills
 - Improved physical fitness
 - Increased training in health care

And when the largest disability population in a community is able to progress in these areas, they develop increased independence, and are statistically more likely to hold a job and/or live alone. As we perform our mission well, we impact the very economy of our communities. And this is one key reason why other state legislatures support their Special Olympics state chapters.

There are thousands of individuals examples of the impact of Special Olympics life-changing programs on those we serve. Let me just share a few:

There is the boy named Eric, with intellectual disabilities. He had lots of buddies in high school because he was just a cool guy, but lost them all at graduation because they went on to college, and jobs and marriage and he could not. Then he got involved in Special Olympics, and said he had found his "forever friends."

There is the boy with severe autism, who had never hugged either of his parents. Then, one day, in a Special Olympics event, ran right into his father's arms at the end of a race. It was the first time he had ever hugged his dad.

There is Amelia with intellectual disabilities, who used to be terribly bullied in her school, until the school launched our Respect Campaign. Today, Amelia is a spokesperson for the cause, a leader in Special Olympics Oregon's Respect Campaign.

There is Jimmy, who has intellectual disabilities as well as cerebral palsy, who tried every year to complete the cross country course in the Winter Games – falling, getting up, falling, getting up – until finally, one year, he made it through the whole course. Jimmy grinned, his mother cried and the whole mountain cheered.

There is Janice, a volunteer Special Olympics Coach, who doesn't even have a child in the program, but who actively helps build and mold the lives of the Special Olympics Oregon participants she trains so that they can develop confidence and a belief in themselves. She is one of over 1000's of certified Special Olympics Oregon coaches.

There is Marie, the elderly woman on a fixed income who worries for our organization if she can't make her \$25 dollar contribution that month. She is an inspiration and a constant reminder of the fiduciary responsibility we have to our donors, no matter how small or large.

In every Special Olympics story, there is a common thread: the revealing of the champion in all of us. The Special Olympics participant knows that he or she is different and yet we are the same:

- they know what it means to be loved or not
- they can set goals and achieve them
- they can learn
- compete
- run the distance
- be responsible
- hold a job
- have a vision
- be leaders
- and do great things...

...and in the process, they reveal the champion in all of us. They make us better, they make us dig deep, find the courage and strength to reach higher and do more than we ever thought we could.

Chair Roblan and Committee Members, there is a powerful spirit to this work – you can't measure it, but you know it's there.

And if you are a fan of dignity, acceptance and the human race, you are already a fan of Special Olympics Oregon.

Thank you.

FINAL REMARKS: GOVERNOR BARBARA ROBERTS

Chair Roblan, Members of the Committee, Kerry and Margie have given you an overview of the tremendous impact of Special Olympics Oregon on the children and youth in our state both in our schools and in community programs.

As you've heard, the bedrock of this organization is partnerships – let me tell you why the state's partnership with Special Olympics Oregon is of the greatest importance at this time:

There are three issues where schools across the country, including in Oregon, are experiencing great pressure from state and federal government entities to solve. Let me give you a picture of those three issues:

- The first issue: **Bullying in our schools**, which threatens students' physical and emotional safety, negatively impacts their ability to learn, can lead to drop-outs and, in extreme instances, even suicide.

Leading the solution is a statewide "*Respect Campaign*" introduced and managed by Special Olympics Oregon in partnership with youth leadership in over 200 Oregon schools...and growing. Students serve as leaders, conducting assemblies, writing and publishing respect articles, producing respect videos, actively using social media – in general, promoting respect and inclusion in their schools.

This highly successful campaign is conducted in collaboration with OASC(Oregon Association of Student Councils), as well as OSAA and has been endorsed by the National Association of State Boards of Education.

The best way to address bullying is to stop it before it starts. And Special Olympics Oregon is on the front lines of this fight and winning.

- The second issue: **Inequity in extracurricular opportunities for those with disabilities**. As a result of recently reported findings by the federal government, schools are now required to solve this issue.

Again, Special Olympics Oregon is a key partner to the state: through its *Unified Sports* programs in Oregon schools, students with and without disabilities are provided additional extracurricular sports opportunities year-round. The *Unified Sports* program also fosters inclusion and greater understanding of all who have disabilities by those who do not.

As with the *Resect Campaign*, Special Olympics Oregon's *Unified Sports* program is offered in collaboration with the Oregon School Activities Association, as well as other major education-related organizations in the state.

- The third issue: **The "obesity epidemic" among school-age children**. The health and wellness of our children and youth continues to be a major challenge; schools are required to implement policies and practices in the education environment to help curb this problem.

And again, the state's partner, Special Olympics Oregon, is helping to meet this challenge. Under the banner "*Wellness Is a Sport*," and in collaboration with the head of the OHSU Wellness Center and other health and fitness professionals, we've developed a year-round nutrition and fitness curriculum for individuals with intellectual disabilities that is also "unified."

This program has been endorsed by the American Association of Health & Disability and is being instituted by Special Olympics state chapters in Washington, Montana, Southern California and Illinois.

In 2016, expansion into Oregon schools began and will continue in 2017.

So, Chair Roblan and Committee members, as you can see, Special Olympics Oregon is *already* your partner. We seek your support – but we do not come to you with an empty plate; we offer the power of partnerships established over years that are the bedrock of our organization and that continue to fund its statewide programs in Oregon’s schools.

Special Olympics Oregon has never requested state funding before – although over half of the other Special Olympics state chapters are supported with state dollars. But we believe our extensive work in our schools today that is helping Oregon meet key education requirements and improving the quality of the education experience for all students warrants our request at this time.

Specifically, we are requesting funding of \$1 million in this biennium’s budget. This crucial funding would expand *Special Olympics Oregon’s capacity to meet the increasing demand for Unified Champion Schools, Oregon Team Wellness and The Respect Campaign in Oregon’s K-12 schools.*

These funds will contribute to a 42% increase in the number of schools participating in these important programs, all of which benefit students with and without intellectual disabilities.

And these funds from the state would be matched by nearly \$14 million already contributed in the biennium by the private sector, including sponsorships, small individual gifts, major gifts, and foundation grants.

As some of you know, I have a son with autism. That parental experience over many years gives me a very personal perspective on this issue. But, again, please know that I would not be here at this table if I did not know how impactful Special Olympics Oregon is to all the children and youth of this state and how critically important this request for support truly is.

This is an opportunity to make this public-private partnership work better than ever – please join with the many Oregonians who support the mission of Special Olympics Oregon to bring Oregon’s students the best educational environment we can.

Thank you.

