

Dear Legislator,

Recently I found out that Oregon is considering a law that would affect the special education services of the students I work with. I am a current student at University of Portland (UP) and an intern working at Columbia Regional Program (CRP). Over the past few months, I have seen how CRP has helped our deaf and hard-of-hearing (D/HOH) students grow academically and socially.

Many D/HOH students are unable to receive the appropriate access to education due to their hearing loss and language barriers as some prefer to learn and communicate in American Sign Language (ASL). As a result, their education suffers. However, CRP's elementary and middle-school level D/HOH classrooms provide a full-accessible educational environment for the students. Their classes are taught in ASL, staff interpreters are available for students to be included in the wider school community and have deaf paraeducators to provide language support with their schoolwork. The one-on-one educational support tailored to individual students allows them to be successful in their academic goals.

One student placed into the D/HOH classroom could not read and was often frustrated with his reading and writing assignments. As of now, they have made tremendous growth in their reading and writing skills. This is due to the support from CRP teachers and staff who have taught them ways to help develop their skills. As a result, they are less easily frustrated, less likely to block out their work, and show more motivation than previously. Another benefit of a CRP classroom is that deaf and hard-of-hearing students can socialize with each other due to a shared language and disability. I have witnessed how they support each other academically and socially. This sense of community has helped students to thrive in and out of school. CRP doesn't only support students, they also support students' families. One of the ways CRP

supports families is teaching ASL to the parents. The goal of teaching ASL to the parents is to foster connections between them and their deaf children.

Columbia Regional Program has done much to help disabled students and their families. I know not as an intern working with the program, but as a former student of theirs. I am a deaf student attending University of Portland, which is one of the top 10 colleges on the West coast.

University of Portland is known for accepting students of exceptional excellence and many graduates go into successful careers. If not for CRP's support services, I would not be as successful as I am today. When I was up for an internship placement, there was no doubt where I had to be placed. I wanted to intern at CRP because I wanted to give back to a program that did so much for me. My experience working with the students has been truly wonderful and I am honored to be a part of their journey into the wider world.

I ask for you, our legislators, to consider continuing to fund our regional programs, so that they can continue providing educational support services to all students of varying disabilities and their families.

Rosa Rackham
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January 2, 2019

To the Honorable Members of the Oregon Legislature:

I am writing on behalf of Lone Community Charter School in Lone, Oregon to express my support for Eastern Oregon's Regional Programs. Our school is part of the InterMountain Education Service District. As a new Special Education Teacher, our district has been very supportive of me. I have had the privilege of receiving visits from one of our autism specialists Susan Rodgers. This has been essential as we have several high needs students here. One of them is a kindergartener and the support we have had from Mrs. Rodgers has been absolutely critical in helping us best meet the needs of this particular student. This student is nonverbal and Mrs. Rodgers has done so much for us such as helping us to create visual schedules and picture cards. She has been able to observe our students and offer suggestions and support. She has provided us with activities and sensory materials to help the students. Her position, which is supported by the Eastern Oregon's Regional Programs, has made us more successful overall and without necessary funding, high need students will not receive the same level of services.

The Oregon Governor's initial budget proposed not to increase, as had been widely hoped for, but to decrease the Regional Program's budget by 5.9 million dollars. This budget cut could be devastating to our services if it goes through. I am writing to request that funding for our program not be decreased at all. If at all possible, let's increase it so we can better serve our young people. I don't know what I would have done without the support I've received from Mrs. Rodgers and many others as well.

Thank You!

Julia Finch
Special Education Teacher
Lone Community Charter School

julia.finch@ionesd.org

February 8, 2019

Dear Governor Brown and Honorable Members of the Legislature,

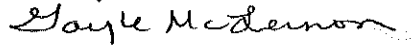
I understand that the Columbia Regional Program in Portland, Oregon is facing a significant budget cut that could result in severe reductions of service to students who have low incidence disabilities.

I am writing to you to describe the importance that this program has in our region. Staff from Columbia Regional Program (CRP) has been highly trained to provide services and supports to a variety of students with low incidence disabilities. This is specialized training that most staff do not have across the district that I work in. Teachers and therapists across our district benefit from the consultation and support we receive from CRP. In addition, we are able to check out a variety of assistance technology for trial use with our students, which we would otherwise not have access to. Access to these supports enables school staff to provide appropriate services and equipment trials in a timely and efficient manner.

CRP also provides high quality trainings to staff across the region that helps build capacity across several districts. It would be difficult if not impossible for staff to receive this specialized training with the quality and frequency that is provided by Columbia Regional Program.

I am hopeful that you will consider restoring full funding to Columbia Regional Program so that they can continue to provide support to so many students in our Region. Truly, without their support and expertise, students will miss out on required and needed tools and strategies.

Thank you,



Gayle McLernon, MA, CCC-SLP

February 12, 2019

Dear Governor Brown and Honorable Members of the Legislature.

I am a physical therapist working in Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education (EI/ECSE). I am writing to plead for funding for our regional programs as you design the state budget for the 2019-2021 biennium.

It is likely that you know, in your personal life, someone with a child who has benefitted and/or is benefitting from Early Intervention (ages 0-3; EI) and Early Childhood Special Education (ages 3-K; ECSE) programming. Many of these children receive additional support from the regional programs. Those children are children with “low-incidence” disabilities—in my own work, these children primarily experience orthopedic impairment (Regional Orthopedic Services), hearing, and/or vision loss (Regional Deaf/Hard of Hearing and/or Visual Impairment Services).

When these children receive a diagnosis relevant to the categories above and others supported by the regional programs, the families are suddenly thrust into a world of multiplying medical appointments. They receive wonderful guidance from the medical community – and need additional guidance in their homes and classrooms to truly maximize the potential of these children for their development and learning. The regional programs are the ones providing materials and guidance to parents and educational staff; without it, kids are not getting the support they need and deserve.

I work constantly with the regional orthopedic services, especially the equipment librarian, to provide “my” kids equipment they need to participate more fully in their home and school environments. Kids under 5 especially grow so quickly that the cost to a family to provide chairs, standers, augmentative communication equipment, and gait trainers, just to name a few things, would be astronomical as they try to continually access the right size of equipment. By the time kids are three, they have gone through at least two sizes of each kind of adaptive equipment (two kinds of chairs; stander or gait trainer), each of which can cost thousands of dollars. The cost would be prohibitive for most of the families I work with, and the kids may get nothing, further limiting their participation in family and educational activities, which is already limited by their motor function. I’ve interviewed for jobs at places that don’t have regional services or equipment libraries, and it’s not what we want for our most vulnerable kids in Oregon.

The vision and hearing specialists employed by the regional programs are essential. They are in the home, and later the classroom, frequently, checking on hearing aid and glasses use. They coach families and classroom staff on how to handle behavioral resistance to those same hearing aids and glasses. They provide families, and later classroom staff, with coaching around how to help their child navigate the world, and invaluable insight on what to expect next. All of this prepares children and their parents to participate more fully in education when the time comes, making kids more ready to learn and progress.

The work done by regional program staff is critical, proven, and effective. Working with children from as early an age as possible leads to improved outcomes in education—this is the unanimous conclusion. It allows children to be mainstreamed with peers as much as possible and as soon as possible, which saves money down the road in education, as well as allowing children to function at their maximum potential. It allows children to maximize their developmental potential as early as possible, which saves money down the road in healthcare costs.

As you know, Oregon is comprised primarily of small to medium-sized school districts who are already struggling with their budgets and staffing. The kids served by regional programs are the kids with the most specialized needs. In order to support the families and school districts, the regional program needs to be fully funded. Oregon is languishing at the bottom of the educational funding heap, and we have to fix this—but at the very least, we have to maintain what we have.

Children's development and education is not a place to cut corners. It is in your power to help them get what they need.

Thank you for your time.
Elizabeth Ruckh, PT



Kate Brown, Governor

**OREGON
COMMISSION
FOR THE
BLIND**
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Dear Honorable Members of the Oregon Legislature,

The Oregon Commission for the Blind provides independent living and vocational rehabilitation services to Oregonians who experience vision loss. We serve students who are transitioning from high school to college/work as well as adults of all ages. We provide vocational counselling and training in order to ensure that persons who experience vision loss (often alongside other co-occurring disabilities) have the training, tools, and resources they need to live as independently as possible in their homes, communities, and places of employment. Our mission is to empower Oregonians who are blind to fully engage in life. In order to best serve in-school youth, we work very closely with regional programs, like Columbia Regional Program, in order to provide students the support they need to make a successful transition from school to community/college/work. Without the important work regional programs do throughout the lifespan of these students, we would most certainly not be successful in assisting these students to achieve their independent living and employment goals as adults.

Regional Programs serve children in early intervention, early childhood special education, and school age through transition and post high school services. Regional Programs serve and support our children who experience blindness, deafness, deaf blindness, orthopedic impairment, autism spectrum disorder, and traumatic brain injury. For all children and families, but especially those who live in smaller districts and those away from population centers, the economy of scale Regional Programs brings often makes the difference for these children and their access to education in their local community and neighborhood school.

We want to express our full support of these essential Low Incident Disability Regional Programs that provide critical services to this important population. We know these are the only programs in Oregon that can provide essential services that help ensure our children with low incidence disabilities have equal access to high quality education in Oregon. We know that districts, students, and families rely on direct instruction from regional staff as well as district staff who rely on Regional Programs for their expertise, coaching, building capacity, and specialized equipment and technology. There is no alternative to Regional Program services in our state; they are the sole providers of these critical services for districts who hold the responsibility to serve all children.

In closing, as a close partner agency of Columbia Regional and other regional programs throughout Oregon, the Oregon Commission for the Blind wants to express our whole-hearted support of the critical services these programs provide to children with low incidence disabilities throughout the state. We are aware that without these essential service supports for our students, we would not have the critical foundation required for us to transition students into a productive and successful future.

Sincerely,

Angel Hale
Director of Vocational Rehabilitation Services
Oregon Commission for the Blind

"Expanding Opportunities for Oregonians with Vision Loss"



February 12, 2019

Dear Honorable Members of the Oregon Legislature,

Portland State University (PSU) hosts the largest Department of Special Education in Oregon. As a major personnel preparation program, we seek to improve the educational and life experiences of students with disabilities through the preparation of highly effective special education teachers and related service personnel throughout the state. At PSU, we host specific programs to prepare educators, including Teachers of the Visually Impaired and Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Specialists to serve students with blindness, low vision and deaf-blindness. We also have undergraduate and graduate programs in Special Education that prepare educators to serve students with autism, orthopedic impairment, and traumatic brain injury. Our faculty and staff integrally connected to Oregon's Regional Programs as our partners in preparing educators through teacher-to-teacher mentoring, practicum experiences, and professional development. Many of the faculty members, staff and administrators in Regional Programs are state leaders and serve as our advisors for creating and delivering high quality preparation programming at PSU.

Regional Programs serve children in early intervention, early childhood special education, and school age through transition and post high school services. Regional Programs serve and support our children who experience blindness, deafness, deaf-blindness, orthopedic impairment, autism spectrum disorder, and traumatic brain injury. For all children and families, but especially those who live in smaller districts and those away from population centers, the economy of scale Regional Programs brings often makes the difference for these children and their access to education in their local community and neighborhood school. In a largely rural state, this on-site support, consultation and specialized knowledge through the Regional Programs ensure that a child with visual impairment in a coastal community have access to qualified teachers of the visually impaired, instruction to travel safely on the bus, and books in an accessible format.

We respectfully request your support to fund Low Incidence Disability Regional Programs at \$43 million for the 2019-2021 biennium. The current projections of funding reduction in 2019-2021 will result in the loss of essential services that help ensure our children with low incidence disabilities have equal access to high quality education in Oregon. This loss will be devastating for districts, student and families who rely on direct instruction from regional staff as well as our district staff who rely on Regional Programs for their expertise, coaching, building capacity, and specialized equipment and technology. There is simply no



alternative to Regional Program services in our state, they are the sole providers of these critical services for districts who hold the responsibility to serve all children.

Columbia Regional Program, serving 3500 of our students with low incidence disabilities, has lost service supports over the past eleven years due to state-level funding shortfalls, despite a **34% increase in students eligible** for services. Due to funding shortfalls, core services provided to districts who serve students with low incidence disabilities by Columbia Regional Program have been reduced or eliminated resulting in less services provided to districts and the impact is to our most vulnerable students.

It is imperative for the State to remedy this **multi-year funding shortfall** for Low Incidence Regional Programs. We are respectfully requesting the Oregon Legislature to support a \$43 million funding request for Low Incidence Regional Programs for the 2019-2021 biennium in efforts to restore critical service supports to our students with low incidence disabilities and ensure districts are able to fulfill their obligation to educate every child.

Partnerships in education create lasting impacts in the quality of life for all of Oregon children and families. The teachers of the visually impaired, teachers of the Deaf and hard-of-hearing, Orientation and Mobility Specialists, Augmentative and Alternative Communication Specialists, and Behavior Specialists who will be eliminated due to this draconian cut means that Oregon students lose access to quality instruction- opportunities to grow, to read, to communicate, to travel safely, to receive positive behavioral supports, and to be fully included in their neighborhood schools. Denying students access to these supports will also have an impact on their transition to work, to college, to careers and to community life. This is a loss that Oregon cannot afford.

Sincerely,

Amy T. Parker EdD & COMS
Assistant Professor
Coordinator,
Orientation and Mobility Program
Portland State University

Holly M. Lawson, PhD
Assistant Professor
Coordinator,
Visually Impaired Learner (VIL)
Licensure Program
Portland State University

Randall L. De Pry, Ph.D.
Professor and Chair,
Department of Special Education
Portland State University

February 17, 2019

Dear Governor Brown and Honorable Members of the Legislature,

I am writing to you to implore you to restore and fully fund the Columbia Regional Program. I am an autism specialist for Multnomah Early Childhood Program and the services that CRP provides for our program are essential. The many services they provide for both me professionally and the families that I serve are undeniable. Due to their program, I am able to keep abreast in my field. They provide the ASD specialists in their region a way to collaborate with each other and enhance our ability to grow professionally and problem solve difficult situations together. They provide training for the staff that I work with that allow them to continue to do their job to fidelity. Most importantly, their program offers a monthly parent workshop during convenient times that parents can access. The parents of children on my caseload have accessed these trainings and have spoken highly of how these workshops have improved their lives and the lives of their children. I cannot express enough how instrumental it has been to be able to access all of the services provided by the CRP program and how detrimental it will be to our ability to serve children with disabilities in the early childhood special education program if the services of the Columbia Regional Program were no longer available..

Sincerely,



Fawn Anderson

Autism Specialist

Multnomah Early Childhood Program