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To: Senate Committee on Education
From: Paulina Larenas, FACT Oregon Bilingual Program Coordinator, Parent
Re: Special Education in Oregon's Schools

Chair Wagner and members of the Committee,

My name is Paulina Larenas, I have been working with FACT Oregon for about 5 years as a Bilingual Program Coordinator. I am also a parent of 2 children, both currently receiving special education services. We live in Clackamas County.

In my role as bilingual Program Coordinator. I provide support and trainings for families who primarily speak Spanish. I see the barriers these families experience on a daily basis. They are trying to navigate a system; they are not familiar with in a language they don't understand. While, IDEA says ***"Parents are entitled to be members of the team that develops, reviews, and revises the individualized education program (IEP) for their child. (8)"*** and they are responsible to, ***(1) Notifying parents of the meeting early enough to ensure that they will have an opportunity to attend; and (2) Scheduling the meeting at a mutually agreed on time and place.(IDEA Sec. 300.322 Parent participation)***

My experience supporting Latino families, I hear from families that are unable to do so in that they may have only been notified about the meeting that day or the day before, and in that they are unable to attend, the meeting is being held without them.

I have done 25 trainings in Spanish this year and unfortunately, I am not surprised to learn that most of the families attending, don't know their child has an IEP. With understanding of the IEP and their important role on the team, they feel empowered to advocate for their children's education, and to collaborate with the school as an equal member of the team, only to arrive and find that the barrier in inadequate language support remains. Families report they are not always offered qualified interpretation. Bilingual staff will be the interpreter without the appropriate training to do interpretations. The result is horrible miscommunication. Have you ever played the telephone game? That's how families feel when the information gets to them, without appropriate interpretation. The US Department of Justice (Civil Rights Division) and the U.S. Department of Education (Office of Civil Rights). ***Information for Limited English Proficient (LEP) Parents and Guardians and for Schools and School Districts that Communicate with Them: "Schools must provide translation or interpretation from appropriate and competent individuals and may not rely on or ask students, siblings, friends, or untrained school staff to translate or interpret for parents."***

Can you imagine attending a meeting? where you are told that you are an important member of the team, and you are expected to fully participate, but you don't know what the meeting is about? The documents are in a language you do not read and the interpretation inadequate.

Making matters worse, I have talked to families that report that they have been threatened by schools

and districts personnel about calling ICE or DHS on them. Can you even imagine the fear they experience?

This last school year 38% of families FACT Oregon supported spoke a language other than English, and shared that participation had been hindered, because all the barriers they face. 28% of them don't receive the IEP or any other document in their own language. Can you imagine receiving documents that are relevant for your children's education and not knowing what they say? The US Department of Justice (Civil Rights Division) and the U.S. Department of Education (Office of Civil Rights). Information for Limited English Proficient (LEP) Parents and Guardians and for Schools and School Districts that Communicate with Them: ***"Schools must communicate information to limited English proficient parents in a language they can understand about any program, service, or activity that is called to the attention of parents who are proficient in English."***

These barriers translate into their students not having the same support, opportunities, and outcomes as the rest of the students. Fear and lack of adequate language support makes participation impossible and must be addressed.

To secure that all students have equitable access to safe, welcoming schools prepared to meet their needs. We need to honor and support everyone in our diverse communities. Showing the new generations, the value of being exposed to diverse communities and learning from one another. In safe, welcoming schools, our children are exposed to other languages, other cultures and people that are different than them, they are curious to learn from others.

Another area of concern I want to share is that of the words we use when talking about behavior. While in kindergarten my son had an incident at school where another student was blocking the slide and after asking him to move, my son kicked him. I received a phone call from the principal, we made a plan and I thought that was the end. After a few days, I received a letter "Disciplinary Action Notice". I was shocked to see that under behavior "**assault**" was listed, I couldn't believe that assault would be even considered to describe a student kicking another student in Kindergarten. This language doesn't provide any supports, and label students in a very negative manner.

My concern is that this language is very criminalizing, and when used at such an early age, results in low self-esteem and lowered expectation for success. This is heightened for students experiencing disability, and even more so for our students of color. We need to examine the words we use and guard against unintended bias. To do so we must ensure that everyone understand the risk and are adequately trained in positive behavioral support. No child, especially a kinder garter, should have to carry the weight of a record of assault in their file.

I really appreciate the dedication of ODE to safe and welcoming schools for all students, as well as their commitment and dedicated work in pursuing equitable education for all. This is a work in progress and we all need to work together to move it forward.

Thank you for your consideration to this testimony.