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March 3, 2021

Chair Dembrow  
Vice-Chair Thomsen  
Members of the Senate Education Committee

**RE: SB 744 – Directing the ODE to review requirements for high school diploma**

Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Thomsen, and members of the Committee,

FACT Oregon is the US Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, designated Parent Training Information (PTI) Center serving Oregon families as they navigate Special Education services. Providing peer delivered support, training, and resources, we equip and empower families of youth experiencing disability to have high expectations as they pursue whole, full lives in community.

The core tenets of our work align with those embedded within the Developmental Disabilities Act, appreciating *“disability is a natural part of the human experience that does not diminish the right of individuals with developmental disabilities to live independently, to exert control and choice over their own lives, and to fully participate in and contribute to their communities through full integration and inclusion in the economic, political, social, cultural, and educational mainstream of United States society.”* (Public Law 106-402, 106<sup>th</sup> Congress 2000).

FACT Oregon believes it is essential that we recognize that one **must first experience integration and inclusion in education** in order to prepare for integration and inclusion in all other areas.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) holds similar affinity for preparing students experiencing disability in their pursuit of whole, full lives in community – making it clear that special education services are intended to support access to core curriculum alongside non-disabled peers, preparing them for adult lives integrated and included in their communities.

With candor, I share that I am in over my head when it comes to the workings of the legislative process, but in that SB 744 seeks to amend ORS 329.451, it would be negligent of me not to share the potential we see for you to address disparity experienced by students experiencing disability.

First, we recommend conveying clarity of conviction that ***all*** students enter school on track for a diploma. Despite legislative efforts to ensure that diploma options are accessible for all students, we have students finishing school only to receive an alternative certificate – a piece of paper that says they attended. FACT Oregon would like to see as part of this bill that the review of diplomas acknowledges the three diploma options (standard, modified, extended) and separate the alternative certificate as an exemption to be sought when a district demonstrates that with access to core curriculum and the provision of supplemental supports, modifications and accommodations identified in the Individualized

Education Program (IEP), the student was not able to meet the requirements for a diploma. This level of accountability ensures that **all** students be afforded the opportunity to achieve a diploma.

The review should include examination of diploma acquisition of students placed in segregated self-contained program rooms. Too often, students experiencing Intellectual/Developmental Disability (IDD), and others in need of supplemental supports, are not afforded the opportunity to see the inside of a general education classroom. Families share with us that IEP meetings for students transitioning into kindergarten result in placement in a segregated self-contained program room; this is especially true of families we have supported that speak a language other than English, and families of color who already experience disproportionality in disability eligibility and placement.

Consent is mentioned 14 times in ORS 329.451, yet families share either no knowledge of what diploma options exist or of what diploma their child is on track for, or surprise in learning that they are on track to receive an alternative certificate. The intent of the statute is clear, but it is not the experience of the families we support. We would like to see more accountability in both the necessity of families being made aware of diploma options **and** in any change of placement that would impact diploma outcome. It should be noted in the IEP when diplomas are discussed and when parents have given consent. Important to note – this also impacts immigrant/refugee families, whose child is identified, per statute, as a student experiencing “significant learning and instructional barriers,” and therefore, unknowingly to the family, issued a modified or extended diploma or an alternative certificate.

ODE implementation of the Student Success Act with its embedded equity stance, along with the Office of Enhancing Student Opportunities three-fold goal to focus its efforts on Inclusion, Equity, and Results, give me hope that we will do what is necessary to address the disparity of opportunity experienced by students experiencing disability that then results in disparity in outcomes.

**In support of SB 744**, upon passage, we would like to see –

- Clarity in the number and types of diploma options there are, and their requirements.
- Commitment that all students upon entering school be on track for a diploma.
- Alternative certificate made an exemption, not identified as a diploma.
- Review of factors that detour students from diploma acquisition, including placement.
- Parental notification of diploma options and any change that could have impact.
- Accountability for parental notification, discussion and consent recorded in the IEP.

FACT Oregon appreciates the support of fellow members of Oregon Partners for Education Justice, recognizing that together our collective voice can be heard, and we can evoke change on behalf of students historically victim of systemic bias and racism.

Thank you for your consideration,  
Roberta Dunn, FACT Oregon

