



February 8, 2022

Chair Senator Michael Dembrow
Vice-Chair Senator Chuck Thomsen
Members of the Senate Committee on Education

Re: Support for SB 1578 and “-1” amendment

Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Thomsen, and Members of the Senate Committee on Education--

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of **SB 1578 and its “-1” amendment**.

FACT Oregon is the US Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, designated Parent Training and Information (PTI) Center serving Oregon families as they navigate Special Education services. We help families raising a child experiencing disability by providing peer delivered support, training, and resources. The outcome of our work is families with high expectations for their child and a vision for the future where our schools and communities are accessible, welcoming, and embrace that disability is natural.

In our role as Oregon’s PTI, FACT Oregon has supported thousands of families who struggle to engage successfully in educational systems on behalf of their children with disabilities. Parents are called upon to navigate complex systems without a firm understanding of their rights or how to ensure their children receive the education they are entitled to under the law.

Students with disabilities were already struggling to access their education before the pandemic, but it’s clear that COVID-19 and the shift to Comprehensive Distance Learning for a big chunk of the last two years has created even more barriers and educational challenges for students with disabilities.

While there is a fairly clear process for families to file complaints directly with the Oregon Department of Education when they feel their school or school district is violating special education laws, there is not a similar process for families to file complaints alleging that a school district has violated other state or federal laws.

Generally speaking, complaints alleging violations of discrimination laws, for example, must first be filed with the school district and the family must exhaust the process at the local level first, which can take a great deal of time. Or families could decide to navigate the maze of forms and procedures required to file discrimination complaints with the Office of Civil Rights for the US Dept of Education or the Civil Rights Division of the US Department of Justice, or they could file a complaint with the Bureau of Labor and Industries, alleging discrimination . . . all of which could take many months or even years to resolve, which is not an acceptable or equitable outcome.



This bill will ensure that there will be clearly defined procedures in administrative rule for the Oregon Department of Education to immediately investigate and resolve allegations that a school district or an education service district has violated a state or federal law, and it will also give the Oregon Department of Education more enforcement authority when school districts are out of compliance with state standards.

We also wanted to note that we appreciated the new Section 6 of the bill (included in the “-1” amendment) that provides for two individuals employed by the Oregon Department of Education to act as student and family advocates. Having a point of contact that families can connect with on the agency-side to assist them in navigating resolution of disputes would be an excellent resource to have at the state level. In our role as Oregon’s PTI, we would look forward to working with them and connecting families to them who could benefit from that level of support.

Thank you for considering this testimony. ***We urge you to vote “yes” in support of SB 1578 with the “-1” amendment.***

Ava Bartley, Policy Director
FACT Oregon