

SB 283 Oral Testimony

Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Weber, and members of the committee thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

My name is Fawn Dietz, I live in Junction City, Oregon, and my family has been impacted by the staffing shortage in special education. I am here to express my support for SB 283.

I gave testimony last week on Senate Bill 819, regarding partial days for children with disabilities and I know that these bills are closely intertwined. If staff cannot be attracted and retained, the schools have no hope of providing full access to school for all children.

Schools are not in fact serving ALL Oregon students as it stands currently.

I find, develop, and deliver specialized education to my son on a daily basis as well as taking care of his many other needs on a daily basis. I have had to learn to be a special education teacher, Instructional Assistant, curriculum expert, and extra curricular director in addition to balancing my role as mom. I have much more in common with the teachers here today than homeschool parents and have even discussed writing that knowledge down to help the distance charter school my son attends. .

Last week I told you a little about my son, an amazing child the schools see as quite difficult to categorize. Autistic, gifted, and with significant physical limitations, his goal is to code the robots on Mars someday for NASA.

The main reason he does not go to our local public school is the lack of staff. It is essential that we educate all children regardless of disability.

My son entered Elementary school in 2018 in the Junction City School District.

After inadequate support measures were offered, we chose to leave the district and use online charter schools instead to ensure that our son was supported.

In September 2022, I restarted the process for the second time of transferring my son back to our residential district. We were even able to work with an advocate and an IEP facilitator. We wrote the IEP, made all the plans, and scheduled to start, only to have the school never find a support person for him.

They had two qualified people that applied, and they offered both of these people positions with JCSD as they have multiple aid positions available.

Both people were qualified, excited to accept, and would likely have made great employees. Unfortunately, they both declined, citing the compensation as the only factor barring them from accepting.

One was offered \$14 per hour; the other was offered \$16 per hour.

I understand the wages are determined based on several factors, including agreements with unions, school district policies, and more I am unaware of.

The school district lists the position as \$14-\$19 per hour. One of these was one of the support staff that works in our home because she loves working with him so much she was willing to consider it, but had to turn it down due only to the offered wage. 4J School District in Eugene, just next door, has set a minimum wage of \$18 per hour.

My son receives just shy of 200 hours monthly through ODDS. Yet the schools don't have staff support for even a classroom aid. This is unacceptable.

No doubt remains that there is anything other than a lack of comparable living wage responsible for the shortage of teaching staff. It has nothing to do with a lack of desire to work in this field.

The more aids that can be provided in classrooms for students who need them, either as a 1:1 or as a floating aid supporting 3-4 children, the easier it will make the jobs of the certified teachers, and the more accessible school will be for all children.

Thank you.