

Senate Bill 572 Testimony

Will Larson

Graduate of Portland State University and Career and Community Studies

I would like to thank the committee for letting me speak today on behalf of the Career and Community Studies program at Portland State University.

It's important to support this bill because Career and Community Studies brings a big variety of support and to have that support expanded would give a lot of individuals with disabilities like myself confidence to go to college.

I am a graduate of the Career and Community Studies program at PSU. This experience opened my eyes to a lot of differences between my high school education and what I got in college. Joining CCS, I received so much more help with homework, studying time and learning to communicate with my professors.

In high school, I did not know how to advocate for myself. School staff provided me with notes that I could write down for myself. I needed more support to learn rather than just being given notes and an explanation of the assignment that was assigned.

During my first year, I had Neera Malhotra as my first professor at PSU. During her class, she was always very communicative to her students and she offered me one-on-one help to talk about assignments and to get to know more about the assignments. She wanted to know her students and how they learned. That connected with me very well. I also had an academic coach. Her name was Christine and she did one-on-one sessions with me for homework once a week for an hour. It was the first time I had someone out of class who helped me understand the syllabus and the sequence of the assignments in the class. Across my four years at PSU, the CCS staff was always there for me when I needed it. They showed me how to use the Disability Resource Center, encouraged me to stand up in front of people and express my ideas.

CCS staff gave a range of jobs to choose from on the PSU campus. I worked in landscaping on campus during my Freshman, Sophomore and Junior years. This was my first job experience and it helped me understand what I wanted to do with my life. Halfway through my junior year, I met a person who works for NWDSA (Northwest Down Syndrome Association) and I took a job as the Youth Coordinator. I had the opportunity to work with individuals with a range of disabilities. I've always wanted to be an advocate and this job gave that purpose. Now that I am out of college, I got a job in Portland Public Schools as a Nutrition Services Assistant. I worked in the schools trying to inch my way forward to being a mentor or assistant to students with disabilities.

Since I graduated, I am more independent. I'm learning and making strides toward more independent living for myself. I'm glad I went through the CCS program. When I first started, I

was not sure if I wanted to do it. The most empowering thing about CCS was that they were always there for me when I needed help. Advocacy was a big part of my PSU experience. CCS gave me a lot of experiences to speak my mind which was new for me. I never thought I could do college if it wasn't for CCS I wouldn't have been able to go to college.

Thank you again for letting me testify to support Senate Bill 572. I hope you'll pass this bill to change the way students with disabilities look at college. I will be glad to answer any questions you have at this time.