

Date: February 17th, 2025

To: House Committee on Education

From: Nick Keough, Political and Legislative Organizer, AFT-Oregon

Re: Support for HB 2953

Chair Neron, Vice-Chair Dobson and McIntire, and Members of the Committee:

AFT-Oregon is a federation of 27 local unions representing 18,000 education workers across early learning, K-12 classified, community colleges, and public universities. Our membership includes faculty, academic professionals, classified staff, and childcare workers in both public and private sectors.

Today, AFT-Oregon is writing to express **our enthusiastic support of HB 2953, which would increase Oregon's investment in special education services and ensure that every student with a disability has access to the resources they need to thrive.**

Oregon has long recognized the importance of an inclusive public school system, where students experiencing disabilities receive the specialized support they require while being included in general education classrooms whenever possible. **However, our state's special education funding model has not kept pace with the increasing number of students who qualify for these essential services.**

When the current special education cap was set in 1991, it was based on an average of 11% of students receiving services. Today, that number has risen to 14.8%, with some districts serving upwards of 18% of students in need. Yet, funding has not kept up with these realities, leaving schools and educators struggling to provide adequate support. Currently, special education programs in Oregon are underfunded by approximately \$700 million per biennium. **HB 2953 would address this shortfall by raising the cap and ensuring the new student weights are fully funded – an investment estimated at \$400-450 million.**

This funding is not just an educational necessity – it is a matter of equity. Without proper investment, schools are forced to make difficult choices, stretching limited resources and leaving many students without the support they are legally entitled to receive. **Educators are**

doing their best with what they have, but without adequate funding, Oregon's commitment to an inclusive and accessible education system falls short.

We urge you to support HB 2953. Our students, educators, and families deserve a special education system that meets today's needs and ensures that every child, regardless of ability, has the opportunity to succeed. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Signed,

AFT-Oregon

<https://www.aft-oregon.org/about-aft-oregon>