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State Senator Kayse Jama

Senate District 24 (D-East Portland, Damascus, Boring)

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

I write in strong support of HB 2953, which would remove the funding cap that currently restricts how much Oregon school districts receive for special education services. I have heard loud and clear from students, parents, teachers, and administrators in my district that the current cap severely restricts schools' ability to serve their students. I believe HB 2953 is crucial to ensuring that all Oregonians have access to equitable, quality education.

The current special education cap of 11% was set in 1991, when an equivalent percentage of students were receiving special education services. Today, the percentage of students receiving services is significantly higher, effectively leaving schools with an unfunded mandate. Without access to proper educational interventions, behavioral supports, and individual attention, students who qualify for these services can fall quickly—and steeply—behind. Oregon schools are required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to provide “free appropriate public education” to students with disabilities, including an “appropriately ambitious” curriculum.¹ Under the current funding model, the state falls well short of this standard. HB 2953 would bring us closer to compliance with federal law, and more importantly, closer into alignment with our commitment to equality and preparing every student for the future.

Insufficient special education funding not only harms students, but also teachers and other school staff. Educators are already overwhelmed in the face of large class sizes and budget constraints; without the necessary support staff, teachers must devote extra time and energy to meet the diverse needs of students requiring special education services. This reduces educators' capacity to engage with other students and impacts educational outcomes for the entire student body.

We cannot expect funding structures we built thirty years ago to address the complex needs our students face today. The time to act is now: each year, the number of students who qualify for special education services increases.² If we fail to address this issue, even more students will be left behind.

Thank you for considering my testimony. I urge you to support HB 2953.

¹ [Neutral Expert Report](#)

² [ODE SOS Audit Report](#)