



# Oregon Synod

*Walking Together Into Courageous Love*

February 19th, 2025

To: House Committee on Education

Subject: Support for Fully Funding Special Education

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

My name is Sarah Loose, and I serve as Director of Disaster & Climate Resilience for the Oregon Synod, a body of over 100 ministries of the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church of America) throughout the state of Oregon. I'm writing today in support of HB 2953 and legislation that fully funds special education services.

As part of the Sacred Organizing Coalition, our Disaster & Climate Resilience initiative, along with the other organizations and initiatives that make up our Coalition, shares a commitment to organizing the hundreds of community-based teams we work with - and the thousands of everyday Oregonians that are part of these local groups - to move us toward an Oregon where all belong. For us, belonging means making sure that *all* students have what they need to succeed in school, and that students' teachers and support staff are equipped with the resources they need to do their jobs.

In our work accompanying families and communities recovering from disasters, like the 2020 Labor Day Fires, we've seen just how challenging it can be for students to learn and teachers to teach in the wake of a disaster. Students get shuffled from district to district as their families struggle to get rehoused. Economic concerns weigh heavily, and the trauma of a disaster can impact students and teachers' mental health and ability to concentrate and succeed in school, not only in the immediate aftermath of a disaster, but sometimes for years following. This, for even the most academically successful and well-supported of students. For students with autism, anxiety, and other disabilities and special education needs, these impacts are compounded and can be especially pronounced. And ultimately, the impacts ripple out to *everyone* in the classroom and school. Special education services are essential to supporting *all* students, in the wake of disasters (yes), and at all times.

But because of an outdated funding formula designed over 30 years ago, Oregon is currently leaving out over 19,000 students or almost 1/4th of the 80,000 students in its funding. That's even though the need has drastically increased for special education services, with diagnoses for those with autism or anxiety and children with other needs continuing to rise.

Doing nothing means young people not getting basic support for their needs. It means more teachers and staff burnout from not having enough resourcing. Underfunded mandates mean local schools having to choose cuts in various programs. Doing nothing affects all of us. We

cannot just let an old law from the 1990s dictate whose children get to belong in Oregon schools.

On an even more personal note, as a parent of two children at Dr. MLK Jr Elementary School, I see on a daily basis how when one child is struggling, the whole classroom struggles, and that what benefits one, benefits all. All of our children belong here as a community. Our school funding should reflect this truth.

I urge you to support HB2953. When we commit to Fully Funding Special Education and Mental Health Support we are ensuring that *all* young people can belong in our schools, so that *every* student can thrive.

Sincerely,  
Sarah K. Loose  
Director, Disaster & Climate Resilience  
Oregon Synod  
2800 N Vancouver Ave # 101, Portland, OR 97227  
sarahl@oregonsynod.org