

House Committee on Revenue
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St NE
Salem, OR 97301

Subject: Testimony in Support of HB 2953 – Increasing the Special Education Cap

Dear Chair and Members of the House Committee on Revenue,

My name is Dave Comfort, and I am a new special education teacher in La Grande School District and I am committed to meeting the needs of our special education students. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2953, which would eliminate the outdated 11% cap on special education funding within Oregon's State School Fund formula.

For decades, this cap has placed an undue burden on school districts, forcing them to reallocate resources intended for the general student population just to comply with costly federal and state mandates for special education services. The reality is that the needs of our students have evolved, and our funding mechanisms must evolve with them.

The Urgent Need for Change

- **Oregon's Special Education Population Has Grown**
The 11% cap was established in the 1990s when special education students made up a smaller portion of the student body. Today, Oregon serves approximately 14.5% of students in special education, with projections showing continued growth. Nationally, 15% of students receive special education services, making it clear that Oregon's cap is outdated and out of step with reality.
- **A Funding Gap That Strains Schools**
Currently, only 65% of the funds necessary to meet the federally required Maintenance of Effort (MOE) come from state-targeted special education funding. The remaining 35% (approximately \$375.9 million) must come from non-special education resources, which diminishes support for all students. This results in school districts being financially forced to make difficult trade-offs—often at the expense of both special education and general education students.
- **Reducing the Number of Underfunded Students**
Under the current system, more than 19,000 students with special needs do not receive the full funding weight they require. Raising the cap to 15%—in line with the national average—would reduce this number to approximately 3,600 students, ensuring that far more children receive the level of services they deserve.

A Direct Investment in Student Success

Raising the cap will not only provide more equitable resources for students with disabilities but also benefit general education teachers, classified staff, parents, and our communities. By ensuring proper funding for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), we create a more sustainable educational environment where all students can thrive.

I understand that this proposal involves a significant budget consideration. However, failing to act now will only shift a greater financial burden onto already-struggling school districts and perpetuate inequities in education funding. The cost of inaction is far greater than the investment required to meet the needs of our students.

I urge you to support HB 2953 to remove this arbitrary cap and ensure that Oregon's schools receive the funding necessary to serve all students equitably. Thank you for your time and commitment to this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Dave Comfort

La Grande Middle School Special Education Teacher
La Grande School District