

Submitter: Penny FitzMaurice
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB5006

Testimony of Penny FitzMaurice
In Support of HB 2953

Senator Leiber, Representative Sanchez and members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means...

Good afternoon, my name is Penny FitzMaurice and I'm here to ask for your support for HB 2953. I'm the proud mom of a 12-year-old middle school student in Special Education. I'm here today to urge you to pass HB 2953 and provide crucial funding for students with disabilities.

The current cap on Special Education funding, set at 11%, was established in 1991. That was over 30 years ago, and it no longer reflects today's reality. Today, approximately 15% of students receive Special Education services, which means nearly 20,000 students are left without adequate support due to this outdated cap. My son is one of those students. He has a rare genetic syndrome, is non-speaking, and requires a one-on-one paraeducator to ensure his safety and participation in school each day. But due to funding limitations, he doesn't have access to the support he needs. His classroom is stretched thin, staff are overextended, and as a result, he's not able to attend full days at school. More importantly, he lacks a consistent, trained adult who can help with emotional regulation and de-escalation when needed.

And yet, my son loves school. He regularly uses his communication device to ask for the bus and express his excitement about going. His teacher is amazing and doing everything she can, but without the resources, even the best educators can only do so much.

Raising the funding cap is not just a financial decision—it's a moral one. It's a step toward true inclusion and a fully supported education system. As Diane Richler said, "Inclusion is not a strategy to help people fit into the systems and structures which exist in our societies; it is about transforming those systems and structures to make it better for everyone."

Please support HB 2953. Thank you for standing up for students like my son.