

To Senator Roblan and members of the Education Committee,

My name is Jennifer Knapp and I am writing in support of HB2597. I am the mother of a child with a chronic health condition called adrenal insufficiency. I am also a special education teacher in Oregon.

As a special education teacher I was fully aware of the rights my daughter had. However, it was a struggle to get her school to help. You see her condition caused many emotional and physical problems that affected her ability to attend school, but my daughter kept exceeding all the state testing so our school psychiatrist refused to test her for special education.

As a current employee working at the school my daughter attended I found myself in a very uncomfortable position with my school principal and school psychiatrist. Letters from my daughter's psychiatrist to the school mysteriously disappeared. The only way I was able to get the school to help was to write a letter to the head of our districts' special education department. Sadly, in the many months it took to get the school to act my daughter had already descended into the deep hole of depression which she still now struggles to overcome.

My daughter was suicidal, I was forced to use family leave and hire on call sitters because I was too fearful to leave her home alone. As truancy notices were sent to my home I became more and more upset and signed up my daughter as a home school student for the remainder of her 5th grade year. At the end of the school year the district finally tested my daughter and decided she qualified for 504 plan which would not be in effect until the next school year. I was assured it would be in place before my daughter started 6th grade. However, the promised 504 meeting was not held until November of her 6th grade year after my daughter's school attendance had already become a problem.

Although the school was not the reason for her depression, there was certainly nothing done by them to help her. Instead as I begged for help I was instead threatened with legal action and truancy hearings. My daughter was not "playing hooky", she was not out running around vandalizing businesses or causing harm to anyone. Instead she was in her bed under the covers and had stopped living. This time I let the notices come hoping perhaps a judge would see the situation for what it was. A child who needed help and support not threats and judgement. A few days before the hearing my daughter tried to run into traffic and was hospitalized at a children's hospital in Portland. Only then did the threats of legal action stop, but still no help was given.

Upon my daughter's release I transferred her to a different middle school in the same district. They immediately put her on an IEP and worked to help make school a safe and welcoming place. Sadly for daughter her prior school experiences were too much to overcome and I decided to send her to a residential facility in Utah. My daughter's childhood was taken by her depression and anxiety, she had to be away from home for 19 months. As a 19 year old she still struggles today. I cannot change the past for my daughter, but I can try to help children who come after her.

Please pass this bill and make sure students like my daughter receive the help and support they need to be successful.

Jennifer Knapp,
Eugene Oregon