



January 30th, 2025

Chairman Ladd
House Education Funding Committee
Subject: Testimony to HB 603

Dear Honorable Chair and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. For the record, my name is Louis Esposito, and I am the Executive Director of ABLE NH. ABLE NH is a disability justice organization and a nonpartisan, nonprofit entity that fights for the civil and human rights of children and adults with disabilities.

Before stepping into this role, I was both a special education teacher and a paraprofessional, working in schools across different economic and demographic backgrounds. I have supported students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (ID/DD) as well as students with emotional disabilities. These were two very different teaching experiences, yet they had one unfortunate commonality—lack of adequate resources.

When I first became a teacher, I was filled with excitement and purpose. I had a classroom of my own, a caseload of students, and a vision for how I could support them in accessing the education they deserved. My students with ID/DD required structured support—augmentative communication systems, behavioral interventions, and 1:1 assistance to progress toward their Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals. However, my classroom was not a traditional classroom at all—it was a makeshift space in an old vocational wing, known as V114. It wasn't just my room—it was also where multiple teachers worked, where students received related services like occupational and speech therapy, and where special education staff gathered throughout the day. The space was divided not by walls but by used office partitions donated from a family member of an administrator. My “door” was a shower curtain. If a student leaned too hard on one of the dividers, it would fall.

I don't share this story to place blame on the school's leadership—they worked with what they had. I share it to highlight how, year after year, our education system deprioritizes certain students, sending a clear message about whose education is valued and whose is an afterthought. My students were not just “special education students”—they were “V114 students,” defined by the space they were given rather than the potential they carried.

Later, I worked as a special education teacher supporting students with emotional disabilities—a vastly different role. Unlike my previous classroom, these students were fully included in general education settings. My job required constant collaboration with mainstream teachers, ensuring my students had the right accommodations and interventions to succeed. Here, I felt the support of families and administration, and my physical classroom was more suited to my students' needs. But even in this better-equipped setting, there were still glaring gaps.

At times, we did not have access to a consistent school mental health counseling. The frequent turnover of related service providers made it difficult for students to build rapport and for me to create a stable, structured support system. Students struggling with emotional regulation often looked to me and our team for

not just academic guidance but also emotional stability. Without consistent counseling services or a dependable network of mental health professionals, our team had to carry more than we should have.

This isn't just about classroom conditions. Research shows that chronic underfunding of special education leads to high turnover among educators. A study by Stock and Carriere (2021) found that special education teachers are 5% more likely to transfer schools and 18% more likely to leave special education altogether in states that reduce funding allocations. When districts lack the resources to provide students with the supports they need, it creates impossible conditions for teachers and paraprofessionals. As a result, the very people trained to support these students leave the field, exacerbating inequities.

Underfunding also disproportionately harms students in lower-income communities, where schools are already forced to stretch limited budgets. A study by McKillip and Farrie (2022) found that schools with higher concentrations of low-income students are left with an even greater shortfall, as they are forced to divert general education funds to cover special education costs. This practice not only undercuts students receiving special education services but reduces opportunities for all students.

HB 603 represents an opportunity to correct decades of systemic underfunding. By increasing differentiated aid from \$2,100 to \$29,556 per student, New Hampshire can ensure that school districts have the resources to provide every student—regardless of their support needs—with a learning environment that fosters belonging, growth, and success. It will help retain skilled educators, reduce inequities between districts, and send a powerful message: that students who learn and communicate in different ways are just as deserving of investment as their peers.

New Hampshire has a choice. We can continue forcing schools to stretch inadequate resources, or we can commit to creating a truly equitable education system. I urge you to support HB 603 and take a critical step toward ensuring that all students, no matter their learning needs, have access to an education that recognizes their worth and potential.

Sincerely,



Louis Esposito
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References

Stock, W. A., & Carriere, D. (2021). Special education funding and teacher turnover. *Education Economics*, 29(5), 443–460.

McKillip, M., & Farrie, D. (2022). Wisconsin's special education funding crunch: How state underfunding disproportionately harms students in high-poverty districts. *Education Law Center*.