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April 9, 2021

Honorable Connie Leyva
Chair, Committee on Education
California State Senate
Capitol Building, Room 2083
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SB 692 (Cortese) as amended April 7, 2021 – SUPPORT

Dear Senator Leyva:

Disability Rights California (DRC), a non-profit advocacy organization that advances and protects the rights of Californians with disabilities, **supports SB 692**. This bill is scheduled for hearing before the Senate Committee on Education on April 14, 2021.

SB 692 would incentivize districts to serve students with disabilities in the most inclusive environment that is appropriate to the child's circumstances. Although inclusion, also referred to as "least restrictive environment" or "LRE," has long been the law, California has failed to prioritize this effective instructional model.

Disability Rights California (DRC) works to make sure students with disabilities have what they need to do well in school and are also able to attend classes with students without disabilities. The primary goal of special education advocacy at DRC is to ensure that students with disabilities can access educational opportunities that enrich them academically and socially. We advocate for equal educational opportunities in the most integrated settings under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Thirty years of evidence-based research demonstrates that inclusive practices increase academic achievement, graduation rates, social emotional and behavioral health, and employment prospects for students with disabilities.¹ States that have increased inclusion/LRE rates over the last decade have seen parallel increases in the academic achievement of students with disabilities.² Most recently, the Ventura County Office of Education and SELPA studied the academic impact of inclusion on students identified for speech/language, chronic health, emotional disturbance, specific learning disability, and autism. The study found conclusively that nearly all students with the disabilities studied performed better on smarter balanced assessments if they spent the majority of instruction time in a general education classroom.³

Although the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) requires schools to report LRE on the federal Annual Performance Measure, California has made almost no progress toward greater inclusion of students with disabilities in the last decade. The state's average rate of inclusion is a full 10 points lower than the national average (53% versus 63%). The failure to prioritize inclusion and inclusive practices likely also accounts for the state's poor academic scores: In 2019, students with disabilities scored on average 88 points and 119 points below standard on English and math assessments, respectively.

SB 692 will help give guidance to school districts and ultimately, to the state, so that students with disabilities can have opportunities to learn in classrooms with students without disabilities.

We want to especially thank the author and his staff for working directly with the disability community, disability leaders, and DRC on the language of this bill.

Students with disabilities are important members of the general education community and are deserving of equal dignity and inclusion with their peers. For these reasons, DRC supports this bill. Please contact me if you

¹ School Integrated Framework for Transformation. Research Support for Inclusive Education and SWIFT. <https://swiftschools.org/sites/default/files/Research%20Support%20for%20SWIFT%202017.pdf>. "Return to Main Document"

² PACE. Promising Policies to Address the Needs of Students with Disabilities. https://edpolicyinca.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/r_humphrey_feb20_0.pdf "Return to Main Document"

³ Advisory Commission on Special Education presentation by Ventura County Office of Education. February 2019 at 3:10. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b_lb7XdGpgs&list=PLglRGe0-q7SZYbtq8bkFXcCU7EEer6V8Q "Return to Main Document"

have any questions about our position or if I can provide any further information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric Harris". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent "E" and "H".

Eric Harris
Director of Public Policy
Disability Rights California

cc: Honorable Members, Senate Education Committee
Honorable Dave Cortese, California State Senate
Tara Sreekrishnan, Office of Senator Cortese
Roger Mackensen, Policy Consultant, Republican Caucus Committee