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**Testimony on SB 100  
Senate Education Committee  
February 24, 2009**

SB 100 represents a joint effort by teachers and parents of students with disabilities to address a critical need the need for teachers and paraprofessionals who work with students with disabilities to have the training needed to make the classroom experience a positive one for the student, the teacher and others in the class. One of the most frequent complaints our agency hears from families is that their children have been placed in classrooms with teachers and/or paraprofessionals who know little or nothing about their child's particular disability, have not received adequate training regarding how to make basic modifications to the curriculum so their child can successfully learn required material, and/or do not know how to respond to their child's behavior in a way that minimizes rather than escalates that behavior. This is not fair to anyone involved.

The majority of students with disabilities receive instruction in general education classrooms for most or all of the school day. Under federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements for access to "highly qualified teachers" in the core subject areas, these numbers will continue to increase. In addition, an even greater percentage of students with disabilities are now taking state required assessments. Requirements that students with disabilities receive instruction based on scientifically-based research create a need for more and better trained teachers. Therefore, it is in the best interest of all parties to increase the quality and quantity of training being provided to teachers. Though there is some good training currently available, including best practices for teaching students with autism, it is not being delivered state-wide or to all who require it. The educators least likely to receive this training are those who need it most, the teachers and paraprofessionals in the regular classrooms where students with disabilities, including autism are placed. SB 100 will supplement, not replace, the current offerings.

There are several components of SB 100 which are especially compelling:

- It requires TEA to develop "professional development institutes," a model that has been successful in the areas of math and reading;
- The institutes will also train paraprofessionals, who are very involved in providing direct instruction and supports to many students with disabilities;
- There will be stipends paid to those who attend, which will increase participation; and
- The training will be based on current research and designed to be effective in teaching the required curriculum, rather than simply generic training on disabilities.

Though the institutes will cover all training regarding all disabilities, the bill's emphasis on autism and autism spectrum disorders is justified even among trained special education teachers, there is a need to update current practices. There are still places in this state operating autism programs based on outdated models that we know are not effective. Additionally, almost all students with an autism spectrum disorder who are included in a general education class are provided supports and assistance from a paraprofessional. These individuals, who are an essential component of an appropriate program, cannot be effective if they do not understand autism.

I hope that you will show your support of students with disabilities and their families by passing SB 100.

Thank you for allowing me to testify.

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