

April 15, 2015

**Testimony by Margaret M. Larsen,
President and CEO, Special Olympics Texas**

To The Hon. Robert Nichols, Chairman, and Honorable Members of the Senate Transportation Committee:

Thank you for your kind attention today. I am here to tell you about 53,446 people in the State of Texas who are part of Special Olympics Texas....and the thousands more who could benefit from our programs.

Did you know that it's estimated that 32 percent of all families in the United States have a family member with an intellectual disability? Chances are, you yourself may have a family member with an intellectual disability. At the very least, you probably know someone who has an intellectual disability.

Special Olympics Texas provides year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for more than 53,446 Texas children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The number of athletes has increased by more than 21,000 since 2008—and more join the program each day.

We use sports as a vehicle to promote health, inspire confidence and improve the overall quality of life for individuals with intellectual disabilities. In addition to physical fitness, Special Olympics Texas offers the Healthy Athletes screening program, which provides free medical and dental screenings to athletes.

Our athletes, who range in age from two years old to more than 80 years old, learn valuable skills that make them twice as likely to obtain employment than other people with intellectual disabilities who do not participate in Special Olympics. Our athletes learn socialization, coordination and they build physical strength. They also become more self-confident and become aware of their self-worth.

Research has shown that young children who participate in our Young Athletes Program make seven months' gains in motor skills in only three months. These gains are dramatic for both children who have Down Syndrome and those who have autism.

Special Olympics Texas is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization supported by private donations from individuals, corporations and organizations. Special Olympics Texas receives no governmental funding.

I want to be clear that today, we are not asking for government funding, just the opportunity to have access to an additional source of possible funding. An additional revenue source such as the one provided by Senate Bill 272 would allow us to serve thousands more people with intellectual disabilities, providing the physical fitness and health benefits that come with regular exercise...as well as the intangibles that self confidence and health can bring.

We are changing lives, every day. Please help us to change even more lives.