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Circle of Friends Awarded Federal Transportation Funding for Accessible School Bus

New vehicle will expand access to community-based learning and enrichment opportunities for youth with disabilities throughout Lane County

COTTAGE GROVE, Ore. — Circle of Friends School has secured federal Section 5310 transportation funding through the Lane Transit District (LTD), bringing the organization one step closer to purchasing a fully accessible school bus designed to serve students with significant disabilities.

The funding was unanimously approved by the LTD Board of Directors following recommendations from the LTD STIF Advisory Committee. The award includes \$179,209 in federal funding toward the purchase of an accessible vehicle that will support student transportation to educational, recreational, cultural, and community-based learning opportunities throughout Lane County.

For Circle of Friends, the award represents far more than a transportation project.

"This is about access, independence, and belonging," said Michael Aguilar, Executive Director of Circle of Friends. "Our students deserve the same opportunities as any other child to learn in their community, visit libraries and museums, volunteer, explore future career interests, and participate in the world around them. For many of our students, transportation has been one of the greatest barriers to those experiences. This investment helps remove that barrier."

The future vehicle will be uniquely suited to the needs of Circle of Friends students and is expected to accommodate up to ten wheelchair positions, allowing students with significant mobility needs to travel safely and comfortably together.

Before the vote, Circle of Friends Board Chair Courtney Leonard addressed the LTD Board and shared the perspective of a parent raising a child with disabilities.

"As the stepparent of a daughter who uses a wheelchair, I know firsthand that transportation is never as simple as getting in a car and going," Leonard said. "For many families, transportation becomes the factor that determines whether participation in school and community enrichment is possible at all."

Leonard emphasized that meaningful learning extends beyond classroom walls and that community participation is essential to helping students build communication skills, independence, confidence, and relationships.

"For many of our students, transportation is not just about mobility," Leonard said. "It is about belonging."

The approval was supported by families who attended the LTD Board meeting to advocate on behalf of their children and share the importance of accessible transportation for students with disabilities.

Circle of Friends currently serves students with complex physical, medical, communication, and educational support needs. The school provides highly individualized instruction, nursing oversight, therapy collaboration, and community-based learning opportunities designed to help students build meaningful lives within their communities.

Federal Section 5310 funding requires a local funding match. While LTD will provide \$179,209 toward the purchase, Circle of Friends must raise approximately \$31,828 to complete the project. The organization has launched a community fundraising effort to help secure the remaining funds needed to bring the vehicle into service.

"This accomplishment belongs to our families, our staff, our Board of Directors, and the broader community that continues to believe in a future where disability is not overlooked but embraced," Aguilar said. "The Belonging Bus will help our students access experiences that many people take for granted, and we cannot wait to see where it takes them."

For more information about Circle of Friends or to support the Belonging Bus campaign, visit [website](#) or contact Michael Aguilar at michael@coforegon.org.

About Circle of Friends

Circle of Friends' mission is to advance equitable access to education, mental health, community, and opportunity for youth with disabilities and for those who love them. Based in Cottage Grove, Oregon, Circle of Friends operates a specialized school serving students with complex disabilities and is expanding services to support youth and families throughout Lane County. Guided by the belief that Every Person Has Value, Circle of Friends works to build a world where disability is not overlooked but embraced.