

Millie Keiter - L.D. 46 Testimony

Good morning. My name is Millie Keiter and I am a Junior at Portland High School. Recently I got my drivers license. As a 16 year old, that is a pretty average milestone that I achieved with the rest of my class. Overall, nothing special. But, when I get home from a long day at school and my older brother, Sam, gives the irresistible offer of driving to Dairy Queen for ice cream, I, of course, accept and sit down in the driver's seat to get ready to go. As I am about to pull out of my parking spot, he leans over to me from the passenger seat and says "wow, I am so excited to get my drivers license," and I just sit there, and I stare at the small shiny Toyota symbol on my steering wheel thinking about how I am supposed to explain to my 19 year old brother with Down Syndrome why I, a 16 year old, has their license and that he won't ever be able to get one. I just decide to redirect the conversation to avoid the questions and guilt all together, and ask what he is going to get from Dairy Queen, "vanilla ice cream with rainbow sprinkles, duh," he says, and I can't help but laugh and forget all about the searing feeling of guilt passing through my stomach everytime I press the gas pedal and use the turn signal on my car, since I know they are things he will never be given the chance to do. Many trips to Dairy Queen and the mall later, those conversations stopped and things were back as they were. But now we are faced with a new issue; college. I come home everyday complaining about all of the work my guidance counselor wants me to do on my college list, and about all of the college visits I have to go on this summer; almost treating college as if it was an obligation, rather than an opportunity. In the middle of my complaints Sam comes into the kitchen and excitedly asks me and our mom when he gets to tour colleges. And we just look at eachother, just like I stared at that Toyota symbol on my steering wheel, I look at my mom for the perfect answer on what to say, and my mind is blank. I stumble over a few beginnings of words which end up sounding like a bunch of gibberish, and I eventually settle on "oh, not for a little while," knowing perfectly well I have no idea if that's true, since most special education college programs are out of state and would be a huge commitment for our family. If L.D. 46 is passed, typically-developing siblings of people with disabilities will have that guilt lifted from their shoulders, knowing that Maine is doing its part to provide as many opportunities to young adults with disabilities all over the state as it can. If you think there are downsides to this bill, I urge you to think about the lives you could change with the implementation of these programs across the state. Not only the lives of disabled students, but of their families, who would be given the opportunity to see their brother/sister, son/daughter, aunt/uncle, thrive and become a productive, employed adult; a pathway that has always been shaded from us due to lack of accessibility. Please, clear the way for Maine to provide resources to *all* of its residents, not just those who are typically-abled. Thank you.