

February 9, 2022

Dear Legislators,

My name is Miatzilnayeli Fairbrother, and I live in the town of Auburn. I am in support of LD 1632. I am the mother of two deaf and hard of hearing children, Bella is 4 years old and Emilia is 7 months of age. Bella currently attends Mackworth Island preschool and my youngest daughter, Emilia receives Early Intervention services in home through MECDDH where they education and guide us regarding the best opportunities for our daughters.

For me, explaining the importance of these programs is simple; without them my husband, Aaron and I would not have the knowledge we have today as parent of children with hearing loss. Many times, we get asked how is it that both our daughters were born with hearing loss, and it just so happens, it genetic. We stepped into a new world that we had absolutely no experience with. Neither side of our family had deafness from birth. We were afraid of the unknown and were worried about our daughters future. Little did we know that a teacher of the deaf from MECDDH would come to the rescue and help us navigate through our unexpected journey. We learned about all the resources that our oldest daughter could possibly access, from hearing aids to cochlear implants, and learning American Sign Language.

Our daughter Bella did not benefit from using hearing aids nor was she a candidate for a cochlear implant, so thankfully with the help of our teacher of the deaf we were already learning ASL. We were so thankful, because deafness impacts spoken language, but with ASL she was able to access this visual language from day one.

Our teacher of the deaf also connected us with a Deaf Guide by Your Side, who came into our home answered questions about how it is to be a deaf adult, and what it is like as a child. It helped us feel like we weren't alone. Having a child with any disability and not having people around you that understand the same emotions can lead to a road of why me, and doubt as a parent.

I agree that now is the time for change! We need changes that include all Maine families, they all have the right to services no matter where they live in our rural State. With the right of services comes knowledge, and that is power when it comes to deciding the educational path for their child. Each family's journey can start one way, but end differently like in our case, but we were thankful enough to be given our options moving forward. We also need MECDDH providers by our side when it comes to IEP meetings. This helps us have an understanding on what is being said, what our rights are, what can we ask for, and guide and advise us.

The changes in Chapter 304 will also help provide preschool programming, school-age programming, social emotional programming, and family activities on Mackworth Island, which is the home of the Deaf community in Maine. Families like mine need this support to understand Deaf culture so we can teach our children. We need the preschool programs to help us with our children in their early years. It's important to start young so that no child is left behind. Parents need to focus on being a parent, but also learn from others and seek help when going through rough developmental phases. Kids will be kids but a child with a disability will always need more support. I have learned that it's okay because at the end of the day, with the right support and information the future of my daughters will just be like any other child. It is my hope that you will support this bill and continue to support Maine's Deaf and hard of hearing children. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Miatzilnayeli Fairbrother