

To The Maine State Legislature:

My name is Dixie. My husband and I are the proud parents of 3 children. 6 ½ years ago, my family moved from the Washington, DC metro area to Maine. Perhaps I should clarify- far Northern Maine; specifically Aroostook County. Although I was excited about the prospect of moving to Maine, I must admit, I was very concerned about one of our children and what impact the move might have on her social, emotional and educational well-being. At this point, I think it is important to add some context so you can fully understand why I was concerned about our move.

One of our children was adopted from China at 9 months of age. At the age of 3, we were shocked to discover that our daughter's delayed speech was not due to continual fluid in her ears as we had previously been told, but instead was a result of permanent hearing loss. We were devastated. Our family was told at the time of diagnosis that her primary language would be American Sign Language due to the length of time she had been without access to sound and her level of hearing loss. We were immediately enrolled in family ASL classes and our daughter began receiving services through the state. Despite the therapies and classes, our daughter expressed no interest in communicating through sign language. Our local school district insisted that she be placed in a self-contained special education classroom with other deaf and hard of hearing children. Ultimately, my husband and I opted to remove her from public education and send her to private auditory oral schools in Pennsylvania and Washington DC. During that time, our daughter was aided initially with hearing aids and later with 2 cochlear implants. I am happy to share that she flourished in the auditory oral schools and the little girl we were told would not speak- does not stop speaking. Eventually, we were able to move her from private schools for the DHH to our local public school in Loudoun County, Virginia. She remained mainstreamed in Loudoun County Schools with DHH support services until we relocated to Maine.

As you can imagine, we were concerned about the move and transition for our deaf daughter. Would a rural Maine school district be able to meet the needs of our daughter? What type of services would be available to a family living so remotely? Is this move in the best interest of our deaf daughter?

Fast forward 6 ½ years...***Our daughter has thrived both in Maine schools and outside of school as a direct result of the incredible support services provided to her through the Maine Educational Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.***

She has entered and won multiple titles in state and local pageants. We are particularly proud of this accomplishment because a large percentage of the scores participants earn in Maine pageants is a direct result of in-person interviews and public speaking. Our daughter has also excelled at sports such as cheerleading even making the high school varsity cheerleading squad as a freshman this year! This weekend we will proudly be supporting her at the Maine State Varsity Cheerleading Competition in Augusta after her squad qualified for States. Besides socially and emotionally, our daughter has also excelled academically as a direct result of the support services she has received through the Maine Educational Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. This year our fully mainstreamed daughter successfully transitioned to high school and for the 1<sup>st</sup> 2 marking periods of this academic year, she has been on the honor roll. She even decided to try singing in the high school chorus this year. How incredible is that?!

I am here today to express my strong support for LD 1632. This legislation is critically important to make sure that families like mine receive the support and services they need regardless of where they live in the state of Maine. Without Teachers of the Deaf and Speech and Language Pathologists specializing in working with the DHH, my daughter would not be where she is today. MECDHH has worked in partnership with our local school district to provide a Teacher of the Deaf, provide consultation services to the district, administered specialized testing to help ensure her academic strengths/weaknesses and needs are identified, and has even sent representatives to IEP meetings to support her educational plan development.

It is my hope that you will support this bill, as well as continue to support Deaf and Hard of Hearing children and families in Maine. I appreciate your time today and thank you for your consideration of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Dixie Herweh