

Dear Education Committee Members,

My name is Paul C. Santamore and I live in the town of Arundel. I am writing in support of LD 1632. I am an uncle of a deaf/hard of hearing child that currently receives services from The Maine Educational Center for the Deaf or Hard of Hearing. My niece's name is Emma Blake and she is a beautiful, resilient, and tenacious four year old girl. From birth, she has received dual-language instruction, speech therapy, physical therapy, and other services in order to develop along with her peers.

Currently, she attends pre-school at the Governor Baxter School for the Deaf and she is thriving due to the support offered to her there. Beyond the academic instruction, Emma is able to associate with other students, both with and without exceptionalities. She is learning tolerance, love, and inclusivity at a young age while being treated in a fair and supported manner at all times. There is no better place for her to learn as far as I am concerned.

With that being said, I believe that it is time to revise the rules that govern MECDHH/GBSD and ensure that all children and all families, no matter where they live in Maine, receive the support they need. Emma is blessed to live in Saco, which makes all of the services she needs easily accessible. She also comes from a family that has all of the resources, both financial and social, to get her what she needs. I worry that without significant changes to the current system, students who are less fortunate than Emma will slip through the cracks, creating both short and long-term issues for them and our community.

I truly believe that the following changes, which could be ushered in by passage of LD 1632, would make a huge impact on the students and families who need the services offered by MECDHH/GBSD.

1. Statewide services for all deaf or hard of hearing children regardless of where they live or how they communicate
2. Possibility of more Site Based Programs near the homes of deaf/hard of hearing youth
3. Having MECDHH providers on a child's IFSP or IEP Team
4. This bill adds in specialty providers such as Teachers of the Deaf and SLPs - listening and spoken language, cued speech, and ASL Specialists
5. Ensures a team decision on school placement
6. Offers housing for HS students that live too far from a site based program
7. Continues to provide preschool programming, social emotional programming and family activities on Mackworth Island, the home of the deaf community in Maine

It is my hope that you will support this bill and continue to support Maine's deaf and hard of hearing children. Please feel free to contact me if I can be of support in any way.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Paul C. Santamore". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial "P".

Paul C. Santamore

CC: Representative Wayne Parry (House District 10) and Senator Susan Deschambault (Senate District 32)