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Support: The Bill 5357

An Act Concerning a Deaf Child Bill of Rights

To: The Honorable Fleischman, Co-Chair, The Honorable Stillman, Co-Chair, and the members of the Education Committee,

We are parents of a 21 year old daughter who was diagnosed at age 4 with a severe to moderate hearing loss. Our names are Paul and Corinne Fahey we are writing this letter in support of an act concerning a Deaf Child Bill of Rights. We as a family experienced many years of struggles and challenges to support Katie's educational needs due to her hearing impairment and learning disabilities.

We never stopped fighting, many advocates, lawyers and sleepless nights to help Katie in support of her determination and good work ethic to want to learn but yet learning was difficult. The language barriers just don't allow a hearing impaired or deaf child to learn as quickly as their peers. What was Katie's primary disability? Finally, going into high school this question was answered. An expert did a cognitive comprehensive language evaluation on Katie. She answered our question by saying either disability can be her primary, it is a flip side of a coin, no matter what she was struggling with learning because of the language gaps. She needed extra language support that she definitely did not get in her early years at her grammar school. She went to two special educational schools but I will focus mainly on her high school years in this letter. We found a high school that could provide a normal life for Katie, to learn, have friends, still live home and experience a normal life for a teenager. It was at a day school that provided special attention to her language deficits. Katie blossomed and grew with much confidence during her high school years. She loved to learn, read and feel she wasn't overwhelmed because of the language gaps she use to experience with her peers at the public schools in our town. Katie made so much progress and felt very good about wanting to continue her education. If she stayed in a public school with no documented language support in her IEP Katie would have fallen behind and who knows where she is today. The High school she attended was a special language base educational school designed to help learning disable students. The head master accepted Katie as his only hearing impaired student in the school. He knew she struggled with the language gaps and agreed he could help her since you teach a learning disable student just as you teach a hearing impaired. The 1:1 daily language support she received during her high school years was remarkable. The progress she gained over the years lead her to earn her associate degree with the hopes of continuing her college education.

The point I am making is this, if Katie never found this school, Katie would not be where she is today. She also opened the door for other hearing impaired students to attend the same high school. The language and communication support needs to be addressed in early educational schools and documented in the children's IEP's. These children compensate and pretend they hear because they deal with their hearing loss in so many ways. It isn't easy not hearing or having a hearing loss- just for one day walk around with cotton in your ears and believe me it would be very difficult. This is a hidden disability that many people do not understand in today's society.

Katie is in college and unfortunately post-secondary is just another challenge she will have to overcome. She learned how to deal with adversity very well at a young age, but why do these children have to struggle? They already have it hard just by having a disability. We urge you to consider and support this bill on behalf of all the deaf and hearing impaired children. Katie's story should assure you how important the language support needs to be provided for these children at an early age, not by the time they enter middle or high school. We give our daughter, Katie so much credit due to her determination, but she gives the credit to the two special language base schools that gave her a good education and confidence to want to be successful in life. One person believed in her and it was her head master of her high school he was out for the betterment of the disabled student. That is what this bill can assure many parents that there deaf and hearing impaired child will not be left behind. Support this bill for the betterment of the hearing impaired and deaf children.