

I'm Matthew Bedard, and I was born profoundly deaf. I currently wear two cochlear implants that help me to hear better. Right now, I'm a sophomore at Johnson & Wales University in Providence, Rhode Island, and I'm working toward a bachelor's degree in culinary arts and nutrition science.

Thank you to the Education Committee for giving me the opportunity to speak before you today.

Growing up in the public school system wasn't easy for me especially as I went through middle school and high school. I felt like my coordinators didn't really understand what my needs were because I was the only student in my class with a hearing loss. For example, during our PPT meetings my parents and I would have to really explain to them how my hearing works for them to fully understand. When I got my second cochlear implant, they thought I could hear perfectly by just turning it on! In reality, I had to have several months of rehabilitative therapy with a cochlear implant expert before I was able to hear and understand speech with my new implant.

While in high school, I had to work really hard to advocate for my language and communications needs to be met. During the PPT meetings, it was overwhelming to explain my needs to the administrators and come with lists asking for services or accommodations. A language and communication plan would have helped me tremendously because it would have given my administrators a better understanding of what my needs were just by discussing the different areas of the plan.

The Deaf Bill of Rights should be passed because deaf/hard of hearing students deserve every right to be successful. The fact that between 71%-81% of deaf/hard of hearing children did not reach goal for CMT & CAPT assessments in 2011 as compared to 35%-58% of their hearing peers, just isn't right. Deaf and hard of hearing students should be up to par with hearing students. We are no different than them except we can't hear as well. We should be having the same success as them.

Please help support and pass this Deaf Bill of Rights.

Thank you.