

Madame Chairperson Richardson and Colleagues:

Subject: HF 3251 Amendment for charter schools serving Deaf, DeafBlind and hard of hearing students

My son, Henry (age 10), is a student at Metro Deaf School, a free public charter school in Saint Paul. I am a proud product of public schools and have attempted to use traditional public schools for Henry. While I remain a supporter of traditional public schools, it became clear that Henry, who is hard-of-hearing and nonverbal secondary to his diagnosis of Cornelia de Lange Syndrome, needed something that the public schools could not offer--a bilingual immersion environment with American Sign Language (ASL) as the baseline for communication. After much research into schools and services in the San Francisco Bay Area where Henry was born, we realized there was no school that could offer what MDS has. Moving from California to Minnesota for Henry to attend MDS has been one of the best decisions we could make as his parents. His communication and personality have flourished in a way that would not have been possible with the limited services available in California. Attending MDS has provided a community of support for Henry that is invaluable.

MDS serves Deaf, DeafBlind, and hard-of-hearing students from 3 years to 21 years old from over 35 school districts, including Saint Paul. MDS does not screen out Deaf, DeafBlind, or Hard of Hearing students with other unique learning needs. Henry along with many of his peers has unique learning needs. Having an environment where everyone uses ASL allows Henry to have unlimited access to peers and adults. He can benefit from watching two teachers sign to each other when planning an activity or problem solving. He has access to all the incidental learning hearing children have in school. As a parent I believe it is critical for MDS to remain a Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing school servicing the Twin Cities area.

I would be happy to discuss my family's story more if it would help give you more context for how MDS provides support for each student and family. MDS is the primary reason why I relocated my family here from California, and Saint Paul residents should be proud to have it as part of the community.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

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