



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council

100 Hancock Street, Suite 201
Quincy, Massachusetts 02171

CHARLES D. BAKER
GOVERNOR

KARYN E. POLITO
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

LYDIA BROWN
CHAIRPERSON

DANIEL M. SHANNON
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Testimony of Kate Bartlett
To the Joint Committee on Higher Education
October 21, 2015

H 1064/S 672 An Act creating higher education opportunities for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities

Dear Chairpersons and Committee Members,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address you on H 1064 and S 672 An Act creating higher education opportunities for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. My name is Kate Bartlett and I am a member of the Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council. The Council is federally mandated to educate policy makers on both the state and federal level about the intent of legislation and its impact on people with developmental disabilities. In addition, the Council works to improve the system of supports for individuals with developmental disabilities and their families by bringing together lawmakers with advocates to make sure people with developmental disabilities are included in decisions about public policy.

I want to take this opportunity to speak with you about the importance of higher education for people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. I am 30 and I live independently in my own apartment, work in the benefits department at AQUENT, a staffing company headquartered in Boston. I have a great social life and a boyfriend. My life is very similar to my brothers, cousins and friends. It's probably very similar to yours. I believe a very important reason for my situation and success is the education I obtained in the Arlington Public Schools and at Middlesex Community College. I worked very hard in school and I had great support from my teachers, my teaching assistant, my classmates and my family. My education took place in "typical classrooms". Because of this, I was able to pass MCAS and graduate at 18 with my peers.

I enrolled in Middlesex Community College (MCC). Director of Academic Support, Jo Mucci, gave a presentation on the tutoring support MCC provides to students. Jo helped us navigate the courses, directed me to the appropriate tutoring services and I passed the English Fundamentals classes. As an accommodation, classmates took notes for me because it is hard for me to listen and take notes at the same time. I also took exams in the Disability Services department in a quiet classroom with extended time. I worked really hard and mom helped me study. I ended up meeting all of my degree requirements except one: Math. I was required to take a Fundamentals of Mathematics class as a prerequisite to the college level math course. I was informed that calculators are not allowed in that Fundamentals of Math class even though they are allowed in a college level math class.



(617) 770-7676 (Voice)
(617) 770-1987 (Facsimile)
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I can't do complicated math without a calculator. My disability testing states that I need a calculator for all math based assignments, even in non-math courses. We spent a great deal of time meeting with professors and deans, writing letters and asking that either I be allowed to use a calculator in this course or MCC consider substituting another course for the math requirement.

It was recommended I take the Fundamentals of Math class in a self-paced format allowing for more, but not unlimited time to pass the course. The class was on the computer, not taught by a teacher. Although that format wasn't the best format for my learning style, I took the course. I worked with my mom, went to the math lab, spent many hours working on this course. I got stuck on long division, which I cannot do without a calculator. When I received a notice stating I was in danger of failing the class because I had not progressed far enough in the course at that point in time, I dropped the course rather than fail. Although I walked at graduation in 2013 because I was only 3 credits short, I don't yet have an Associate Degree.

I know I got further in college than most people with Down Syndrome. I was qualified, had documentation about my disability and accommodation needs and yet, I still ran into a roadblock. Unfortunately there are still barriers to higher education for people with disabilities, even for people who have met the requirements to attend college. I credit my education, college included, as an important reason I am working and living independently. I can't imagine the barriers that exist for students with more challenging disabilities.

Based on the Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council's analysis of H 1064 and S672, both bills will have a positive impact on individuals with developmental disabilities because they will provide inclusive higher education opportunities for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The legislation expands the Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment grant program, supporting partnerships between high schools and public institutions of higher education in order to include students with disabilities. The bill also provides consideration of higher education for older students through the special education process. It includes provisions allowing students with severe disabilities to participate in college courses, even if they are unable to pass MCAS. I appreciate the opportunity to educate Committee members further about this bill and welcome the opportunity to schedule a following up meeting with members and Council staff if additional questions arise.

Thank you,

Kate Bartlett