



Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council

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Senator Jason Lewis, Chair
Representative Kenneth Gordon, Chair
Senator Patricis Jehlen, Vice Chair
Representative Bruce Ayers, Vice Chair
Joint Committee on Education
Massachusetts State House Boston, MA 02133

RE: H.650/S.436: An Act Relative to Affirming and Maintaining Equal Access to Public Education for all Children.

My name is Josh Gladstone, and I am the Disability Policy Specialist at the Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council (MDDC), where our mission is to provide opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities and families to enhance independence, productivity and inclusion.

This legislation is a priority to the MDDC and students with developmental disabilities throughout Massachusetts. For example, Cynthia Laine resides in Fitchburg, MA and is a mom of 4 boys, two of whom are diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Cynthia works as a Haitian creole interpreter and translator. Her experience as an interpreter and translator makes her acutely aware of the importance of providing services that are accessible to students and their families of different backgrounds. In addition, parent advocate, Priscilla Bessa from Northborough, MA, also understands the importance of ensuring language access to educational services through her efforts to support and advise members of the Portuguese speaking community in public schools.

Research shows that many teachers lack basic foundational knowledge about the issues that English Language Learners face despite the fact that 88% of educators teach these students (Miranda, 2017). This can lead to students where English is not their first language to be disproportionately identified as having learning disabilities. Research also showed that these ELL students had different levels of academic achievement than their peers (Shifrer et al., 2011). This legislation is important because it ensures qualified interpreters are utilized for parent meetings, evaluations are offered in the child's primary language for an accurate demonstration of their ability and protects students and families from discrimination in schools.

This legislation would help ensure that families from all backgrounds have access to public education and is a meaningful step toward affirming that inclusion is not optional—it's a right throughout Massachusetts. The MDDC believes that this legislation would benefit English learners with developmental and other disabilities.

Thank you for your consideration,

Josh Gladstone
MDDC, Disability Policy Specialist

Sources:

Miranda, J. L. W., Wells, J. C., & Jenkins, A. (2017). Preparing special education teacher candidates to teach English language learners with disabilities: How well are we doing? *Language Teaching Research*, 23(3), 330-351. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.bu.edu/10.1177/1362168817730665> (Original work published 2019)

Shifrer D, Muller C, Callahan R. Disproportionality and learning disabilities: parsing apart race, socioeconomic status, and language. *J Learn Disabil*. 2011 May-Jun;44(3):246-57. doi: 10.1177/0022219410374236. Epub 2010 Jun 29. PMID: 20587753; PMCID: PMC4133990.