

April 13, 2023

In support of **H7721**

Dear Honorable Members of the House Education Committee,

My name is Kerri Cassino and I am a special needs parent to Ava, age 14, who has been diagnosed with nonverbal Autism. My daughter is currently participating with an Individual Education Plan in a specialized school placement from Johnston RI district.

I am testifying today in support of **Rep. Kislak's bill H7721** to ensure that parents/caregivers have a meaningful participation in their child's special education.....

My voice was not enough to advocate for a speech device, in Ava's most fundamental years. Ava was not given the opportunity to a Free Appropriate Public Education under the laws of IDEA, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

The Johnston School District denied my daughter a speech device several times. The Specialized School placements couldn't keep her safe. In turn, resulted in, self injurious behavior and in my opinion, my daughter was treated as a throwaway child.

Over 8 years, my daughter went through a revolving door, in and out of Institutions, where she didn't belong.

One of Ava's treating hospitals in Connecticut, provided a way for communication to help with-frustration and anxiety levels. Ava learned quickly on this speech device.

The State of Connecticut, around age 11 approved Ava for LAMP, Language Acquisition through Motor Planning and I was asked WHY wasn't she already involved with access to a Speech device from Rhode Island!?!

Appropriate Speech interventions became the root cause of Ava's inpatient hospital admissions.

I am also a member of **SPEAR**, Special Education Advocacy and Reform and share a bit of concern regarding The Rhode Island Department of Education, following the laws and keeping the Rhode Island District's accountable.

Again, please consider passing bill H7721.

Thank you for your time,

Kerri Cassino, Johnston RI, Rep-Cardillo

