

Kate Tokarski,  
RI House Bill H7415  
Opposed  
Hopkinton, RI Resident

Good evening,

My name is Kate Tokarski, and I am a resident of Hopkinton. I am a social worker and a mom to 4 medically complex children. And I am a proud Charter School parent.

I am here to talk about the difference attending a charter school has made for my daughter, Meghan, who is a senior at the Greene School in Exeter, versus the experience my older daughter had while attending our local public school.

All four of my children have a combination of auto-immune diseases and autonomic dysfunction diagnoses which tend to cluster in families like mine.

My older daughter started at the public HS, and immediately had 2 surgeries resulting from structural abnormalities due to her EDS, or Ehlers Danlos Syndrome; and joint degradation due to JIA, or juvenile arthritis. Unfortunately, shortly after, she was essentially forced to transfer to homeschool in the middle of her sophomore year due to more absences accumulating because of chronic and unrelenting pain resulting from being unmedicated for 6 weeks due to developing a drug induced lupus. While waiting through prior authorization red tape for a new medication, she received a truancy violation notice from her school and I was reported to DCYF for neglect. Ultimately largely due to the public school's inability to manage such a complex child, she ended up electing to get her GED, just so she could finish school and move onto whatever came next. It was truly devastating for her to watch her peers continue to enjoy a traditional high school experience, like proms, senior week, sports and graduation. I'm proud to say that the kid, who was pushed aside and referred to as an "outlier bringing down the rating for attendance" My daughter, is now in the JAA program at CCRI in her third semester, on the dean's list but still a full year behind her peers, all because of a school who didn't have "the bandwidth to deal with a kid like her".

My youngest daughter also has a diagnosis of EDS. What this means to her is that her smooth muscle stretches as well as her skin and ligaments. Smooth muscle is found on the walls of internal organs and passageways which is where it largely affects Meghan and ultimately has resulted in 6 surgeries, 5 between the summer before her sophomore year and the spring of her junior year. For the years before Meghan got into the Greene School for the spring semester of her junior year, I was sure we were headed on the same trajectory as she too received a truancy violation.

But the Greene school has been amazing, they are able to look at a medically complex child as a whole person instead of an "outlier", they have worked tirelessly to build a hybrid schedule that still meets all of RIDE's requirements yet considers how my child learns and her medical situation. I'm happy to say, that because of the caring staff and

the ability of the Charter school to adjust to how a child learns and what they need to be successful, my daughter has been to a prom and will soon go to another and she will walk across that stage on June 6, WITH her friends and classmates as a straight A student.

I believe in public education, but we cannot continue to pretend it doesn't need to be fixed. It is time that this legislature starts seeing charter public schools as a partner in this mission.

By prohibiting their growth, H7415 ignores the voices of thousands of families who seek specific educational environments to meet their children's unique needs. Families like mine. And more importantly, students who don't fit into the educational box we have been shoving them into for years, yet can not only SURVIVE, but THRIVE in the right environment.

I urge this Committee to oppose this bill.

More families, not fewer, deserve the opportunity to find the public school that is the right fit for them. H7415 ignores the voices of thousands of families like mine who seek specific educational environments to meet their children's unique needs.

Thank you.