

Testimony of Rachel Krahn

Senate Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee

Tuesday, March 29, 2022

Chair Tomassoni and the Senate Committee:

My name is Rachel Krahn. I am the mother of Anna Krahn, our 18-year-old daughter who has Down syndrome. We thank you for the privilege to provide testimony in support of this important bill (SF3972).

We have lived in the far northern part of Minnesota, the city of Roseau, since Anna was born in 2003. We have worked hard to have Anna included and to be challenged to achieve her highest potential in all areas of her life and our community. Being in a smaller rural school district, there were no community programs specified for children with disabilities. We made special efforts, along with the help of coaches, instructors and teachers, so that Anna was able to participate to her ability. I am pleased with the inclusiveness of her peers and the adults in these situations. They have grown and improved in so many areas right along with Anna. This May she will proudly walk-through graduation with her classmates. Most of those classmates will continue on to further higher education. We are still undecided what the future will be for Anna.

Our school district does not offer a separate program for transition-aged special education services. They offer services until age 21 in the school district, but this would be in the same special education resource room as the 7th through 12th grade students with disabilities. I am currently working with our school board and administration to develop a more engaging and challenging option for the students with disabilities who are continuing their education in the public schools after 12th grade.

Just like her older brothers, Anna has a strong desire, and expectation, that she will continue her education and life development in college. However, there are many barriers to her accomplishing these goals. There are currently only 3 programs in the state of Minnesota that are available for students with intellectual disabilities. There is only one program, the Bethel University BUILD program, that offers on-campus housing, and this has a very limited enrollment each year. None of these programs are offered in the northern part of Minnesota, which would mean our family would have to relocate for her to participate in any of these programs. Anna has expressed a strong desire to attend the BUILD program. We have toured the campus and would like this to be an option for her in the near future, but we are unsure how we would pay the high cost of the tuition. She would not qualify for academic scholarships like her brothers did to make private school tuition more affordable.

Here in the state of Minnesota there is a definite need for more accessible higher education programs for students with intellectual disabilities. That is why we are strongly in support of the SF3972.