

Chair Cwodizinki and Members of the Senate Education Policy Committee:

I am writing in support of SF1024 both as a parent of two students who attend Metro Deaf School (MDS) and as a MDS Board Member. SF1024 (and its companion bill HF59) is critical for the ongoing operation of MDS as a school that meets the needs of Deaf, Deaf-Blind and Hard-of-Hearing (D/DB/HoH) students.

Since its founding in 1993, MDS's mission has always been to meet the needs of Deaf, Deaf-Blind and Hard-of-Hearing (D/DB/HoH) students. At MDS, all students and staff use American Sign Language (ASL) and students thrive because they have full language access. MDS's ASL/English bilingual approach allows D/DB/HoH students to be with their peers and to have full access to language and information not just from teachers, but everyone in the school. The majority of MDS staff are D/DB/HoH themselves and serve as role models and professional educators and service providers for our students, and all MDS staff members are trained to work with D/DB/HoH students.

My family moved to Minnesota in 2018 primarily for the educational access that MDS provides to D/DB/HoH students. My two daughters (a 7th grader and a 5th grader) are thriving at MDS, in contrast with their previous experiences in schools that did not primarily serve D/DB/HoH students with a bilingual ASL/English approach. While the teachers and staff in their former schools were well-intentioned, my daughters were often isolated from peers, missed out on learning and generally did not have full access to school due to lack of language access. Since joining MDS, my daughters have been able to have friends, play sports, compete on academic teams, participate fully in school, and just be kids -- their whole environment is accessible. Additionally, at MDS my children, who are Black, have exposure to other students like them and from a variety of other diverse backgrounds.

SF1024 is critical for the ongoing operation of MDS as a school that meets the needs of D/DB/HoH students. Students attend MDS from over 35 different school districts, and passing this bill ensures resident districts can continue to use MDS as their federal setting 4 option for D/DB/HoH students. This is important because the majority of students are placed at MDS by their resident district because they do not have a comparable program using ASL/English bilingualism. Additionally, MDS does not screen D/DB/HoH students based on any additional educational needs. Indeed, about 35-40% of MDS students qualify for other special education categories as well.

I ask that you support the passage of SF1024. This bill simply clarifies that MDS may continue to serve D/DB/HoH students, which it has been doing for nearly 30 years. There is no additional cost to passing this bill as Metro Deaf School has always operated this way.

Thank you.

-IJR

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