

Jessica Sanchez-Torres

Parent, Metro Deaf School Birth-3 Program

Testimony in support of SF2502

Senate Education Finance Hearing

Tuesday, March 25, 2025, 8:30 am

Chair: Sen. Mary Kunesh

My name is Jessica Sanchez-Torres. I was introduced to MDS by a physician back in May of 2023. My son Felipe Torres, who attends MDS was born hard of hearing in April 2022. Shortly after Felipe was born, he was diagnosed with sensorineural hearing loss. A diagnosis we had never heard of before and became something we feared and grieved.

Because of all the information that was thrown at us by numerous doctors, nurses, therapists, and clinical staff. There were months of testing and imaging but never any answers or support along the way. However, searching for a way to help my son succeed in a world I was completely unsure he would ever be a part of I found MDS.

My first interaction with the school was with Ms. Carla Larson, birth to the age of three coordinator. Carla met with me shortly after reaching out to the school. In a brief meeting at the school, I was overwhelmed by all the support she and MDS was offering and he was just a few months old. After meeting Carla, some other staff members and seeing what they could offer Felipe I knew this is the program that would give my son the skills and knowledge he needed at this time in his life.

While still going through countless doctor's appointments Felipe and I began attending the parent's class. Once a week for about six months we were able to not only be introduced to ASL and deaf culture but we were able to meet other families who were going through the same thing. Meeting parent's that shared the same or similar feelings has become one of the biggest support systems we have. Felipe is the only person in my family who is deaf and we knew absolutely nothing of this. As most people with a new baby, we wanted everything to be perfect. When you are given the diagnosis and impressions that he isn't, it can be very difficult.

While attending the parent's class and finding support in every direction we were also well prepared for what was to come. At the age of one Felipe was to attend the class twice a week by himself from 9:00am-11:30am. Although this seems like such a short amount of time for what we call "school". Our son has surpassed the expectations and goals we have set for him.

Every time we went to class it ended with 'how else can we help', 'what else do you need', 'what questions can we answer'. Something as simple as Ms. Larson reading his audiogram to us in a way we could understand so that we could interpret our emotions in the matter it made a world of difference. Understanding the meaning of hard of hearing gave us answers, gave us

comfort. Having someone with the knowledge and compassion to do this for us meant so much to us. As we had sat down with many doctors who never taken the time. Another decision MDS helped us with providing input from other families on the process and outcome of cochlear implants, helped us decide if they were right for our son. As opposed to being diagnosed and scheduled for implantation as soon possible by his Audiologist.

Now that Felipe attends class by himself. We are so proud to say he is thriving. In less than a year, he began using 2–3-word phrases, understanding conversations, joining in conversations, and responding ALL IN ASL. While teaching him they haven't forgotten about us as a family. MDS informed us that because Felipe is a student, we were eligible for family classes. A course hosted by the school at the school that would teach us as his parents as well as our other children, his siblings, to communicate with him in ASL. All at no cost to us.

This opportunity is a blessing we are extremely grateful for. Being able to provide him with the skills and knowledge to succeed is extremely important. However, being able to be a part of his world means everything. My family and I are extremely proud and grateful to be a part of this program. The excitement continues as we learn and support others as they enter the class.

Please understand how important the staff at MDS and the families who support them are. Our son needs a place to be fully emersed in ASL and the culture as this will be his only means of communication throughout his life. We feel comfortable that he is on the right path and more importantly were right there with him on his journey.

Thank you for your consideration,

Jessica Sanchez-Torres
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