

Sorena Beng

Parent, Metro Deaf School

Testimony in support of SF2502

Senate Education Finance Hearing

Tuesday, March 25, 2025, 8:30 am

Chair: Sen. Mary Kunesh

My name is Sorena Beng; I am the mother of 2-year-old Ari Yanson. Ari was diagnosed with severe bilateral sensorineural hearing loss at birth. Currently, we reside in Rochester, Minnesota, home to the Mayo Clinic. Unfortunately, even with the clinic so close by, we struggled as a family to find the best resources for Ari.

After months of working with his cochlear implant, we decided American Sign Language was his best communication tool. When we started his journey with sign language, Ari was behind in his language development. My husband and I attempted to teach ourselves and our three children ASL through YouTube and online college courses, but we found it challenging. We noticed Ari's frustration as he struggled to express his wants and needs. Oftentimes, Ari would throw his head back onto the floor in frustration. It was one of the most heartbreaking stages of this journey. My husband and I could no longer bear to see him so upset, and we knew he needed better support.

Although Rochester's school district supported us as best they could, there is no ASL program here for him. So, we searched elsewhere and found Ms. Carla at Metro Deaf School in Saint Paul. We scheduled a tour and fell in love with MDS right away. Both my husband and I felt the birth-3 program was exactly what Ari needed. The staff was so supportive, understanding, and very educated on every aspect of this hearing loss journey. We felt a sense of community and were eager to call it home!

Ari has been enrolled at Metro Deaf since the end of January 2025. He and I attend the Monday morning parent class, and he also attends the birth-3 class on Tuesday/Thursday morning! In the very short time he has been enrolled, we have seen a huge improvement in his ability to express himself, his confidence, and his sense of self. He has increased his sign language vocabulary and has learned many new tools to help communicate his thoughts and needs. He is working on things more independently and has become much more confident in unknown situations.

I have also benefited from the Monday parent class. Ms. Carla and her support staff have been so welcoming! During class, Ms. Carla offers tools and resources for us to take home and encourage ASL development outside of the classroom. This kind of support is exactly what I was looking for. I needed someone who understood what Ari needed and how I could better

support him. The emotional support I have gained from fellow parents in the class is also unmatched!

Because my family and I have seen the progress in Ari's language skills and have so strongly felt the sense of community at Metro Deaf, we have decided to relocate to the Twin Cities.

Although uprooting our family of 5 is not the easiest task, we know that Metro Deaf is the right place for Ari. We are so thankful for their birth-3 program and are very excited to watch him grow for the rest of his time here!

Sincerely,

Sorena Beng
Rochester, MN