

I am sorry I could not be here in person this afternoon. Prior to this committee starting its work my daughter Eva, who has Williams syndrome, and I gave testimony to both the house and senate ed committees. I think some of you likely were there and if you were I would guess you remember Eva's words.

Eva emphasized how important it is to her future, her sense of identity and her value as a human being that she be given the same opportunities as any other student in Vermont. She testified that a school that would not let her in because she has a disability is undermining her value as a human being, and that this hurts.

I agree with what she said, and also would point out now, as I did then, that any institution, regardless of its size or location, that accepts public money must use that money in accordance with the nondiscrimination laws of our State and Country. I say this both as Eva's mom and as a taxpayer. It is unconsonable that tax dollars would be used to support discrimination of *any* kind, including against individuals with disabilities.

Further, -- and here is where I believe this working committee has gotten stuck and gone off the rails -- the first step is for independent schools to have open enrollment for all, not simply those without disabilities or those with certain disabilities that they deem more acceptable. Then the questions of cost, reimbursement, and least restrictive environment can be addressed. Mixing these issues skirts the critical issues of civil and human rights.

I understand that being nondiscriminatory may cost independent schools money, and may even lead some to have to close their doors. If so, perhaps they will take an option that is open to them, which is to operate without accepting State money. However, if they do accept *any* students whose tuition is paid by the State of Vermont, they must have open enrollment -- it is neither moral nor legal for them to do otherwise.

Thank you.