



Massachusetts Down Syndrome Congress

TO: Members of the Joint Committee on Higher Education
FROM: Sarah Cullen, Family Support Director, MDSC
RE: **H.1331, S. 846(An Act Creating Higher Education Opportunities for Students with Intellectual Disabilities, Autism Spectrum Disorders, and other Developmental Disabilities, with a companion bill for students over age 21)**
DATE: July 13, 2021

The Massachusetts Down Syndrome Congress (MDSC) is a non-profit organization established in 1983 representing more than 5,000 people with Down syndrome in the Commonwealth.

Today, with access to innovative health care, early intervention, and best practices in education, individuals with Down syndrome can contribute to their communities in meaningful and fulfilling ways.

As an organization that continually promotes best practices in inclusive education and works with families, educators and school systems, the MDSC has made these bills which provide access to higher education as our top priority in our 2021-2022 legislative platform. (House Bills 1331 /Senate Bill 846). We strongly support these bills because of the significant, positive, educational impact we see this legislation having on the members of our community.

According to research, we know students with Down syndrome are globally more successful as adults when they are provided with the opportunity to be educated with their non-disabled peers. This statistic supports the importance of providing students with the opportunity to participate in inclusive higher education.

In order to ensure that individuals with Intellectual Disabilities and Autism Spectrum Disorders are well prepared to enter into their adult community, we need to remove barriers and provide all young adults with the opportunity to access higher education opportunities in Massachusetts.

We are lucky to live in a state where there are 29 public institutes of higher learning. While Massachusetts should be proud of the fact that the current MAICEI program has created opportunities for young adults with Intellectual Disabilities and Autism Spectrum Disorders to participate in college courses with their typical, age-level peers, this opportunity is limited by the number of colleges in the state grant program, the geographical location of the participating institutes, and the grant program is also targeted for individuals who are still in special education and younger than 22. .



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The barriers precluding access to higher education for individuals with intellectual disabilities should be removed, so that all families in the Commonwealth have the right to consider this type of experience for their child. This will only be a reality if this comprehensive bill is passed.

We have seen first-hand the positive impact the Massachusetts Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Initiative (MAICEI) has had in the lives of many individuals with Down syndrome across the Commonwealth who are now employed in meaningful integrated employment opportunities.

On a personal note, my son Matthew, who was born with Down syndrome, attended three semesters at Salem State University through the MAICEI program. It was an invaluable experience for Matthew and he is now employed by two local businesses in Ipswich. Although this was an incredible opportunity for Matthew, it ended on his 22nd birthday. He would truly value the opportunity to return to Salem State University to take additional classes related to his medical field to realize his dream of obtaining a paid inclusive job in a medical community. He is now volunteering at Beverly Hospital, and he thinks with more classes he might be able to get a paid job some day.

On behalf of our entire organization and the families and students we serve, I thank you for taking the appropriate steps in ensuring a timely approval of this very important bill.

For further comment, I can be reached at 781-221-0024 or scullen@mdsc.org.