



Massachusetts Down Syndrome Congress

TO: Members of the Joint Committee on Higher Education
FROM: Maureen Gallagher, M.S. Executive Director, MDSC
RE: **H.1064/S. 698 - *An Act Creating Higher Education Opportunities for Students with Intellectual Disabilities, Autism Spectrum Disorders, and other Developmental Disabilities***
DATE: July 12, 2017

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 included House Bill 1064/Senate Bill 698 *An Act Creating Higher Education Opportunities for Students with Intellectual Disabilities, Autism Spectrum Disorders, and other Developmental Disabilities* as our priority bill for our 2017-2018 legislative platform. We strongly support this bill 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 transition programs.

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 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 over 100 institutes of higher learning. While Massachusetts should be proud of the fact that the current ICE 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, the percentage of individuals who can access this opportunity is limited by school-district participation, as well as the geographical location of the participating institutes.

Every family in the Commonwealth has the right to explore this type of experience for their child, and this will only be a reality if this comprehensive bill is passed.

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

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 mgallagher@mdsc.org.