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January 28, 2022

Representative Curtis Sonney
Chair, Education Committee
4457 Buffalo Road, Erie, PA 16510

Representative Sonney;

I write this in support of House Bill 726, "Disability Inclusive Curriculum Legislation". This legislation promises to provide great strides forward in ensuring that our communities are welcoming and accepting of people with disabilities.

I am Deaf and I am the second Deaf Executive Director for the Deaf-Hearing Communication Centre, a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization based in Swarthmore, PA providing a multitude of services for Deaf individuals in the Philadelphia region.

Growing up in the 1970's and 1980's, it was challenging for me and many of my fellow community members. We didn't have the civil rights that the Americans with Disabilities Act later gave us, we were relegated to second-class citizenship in our own communities.

There were times as a young Deaf person that I would hide my hearing aids, letting my hair grow long and being painfully quiet as not to let people know I couldn't hear. The social isolation among my peers was far more difficult than any other element of disability.

Even with the full civil rights afforded by the ADA, we continue to fight for truly equal access. The ADA is not a fully-empowered Civil Rights law, meaning that many barriers exist for people with disabilities. As an example, for the provision of sign language interpreting services, entities pay for those services out of pocket. As a result, many Deaf individuals face uphill battles to get equal access to critical services.

Education programs created by HB726 are a long-term approach to resolving these issues. When the students of today fully understand how to create inclusive communities and services, they will bring those perspectives to their future jobs and fight toward that objective.

I thank you for your support of this bill.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Neil McDevitt', written in a cursive style.

Neil McDevitt
Executive Director, DHCC