



April 10, 2020

Dear Senator Collins,

Speaking Up For Us (SUFU) is Maine's Self-Advocacy Network for people living with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD). Self-Advocacy is part of the civil rights movement for people living with I/DD to advocate and voice their experiences and opinions on issues that are important to them. Self-Advocates have been organized and advocating for the rights of people living with I/DD in Maine since 1993.

Yesterday, a letter was issued with over 300 national and state organizations signing on to protect the education civil rights of students living with disabilities across our country. Self-advocates from Maine want you to know that we believe that the civil rights that have been put into law must remain in effect, even during a time of crisis.

We want our Congressional Delegates to know that we feel there should be NO ADDITIONAL waivers necessary under the IDEA or Rehabilitation Act that would waive certain rights and laws that are in place for providing education to students living with disabilities.

Many families are dealing with the reality of "schooling at home" during the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes many students across Maine that have Individualized Education Plans (IEP) to help them succeed at school. Civil rights are so important to people with disabilities because we live in a society that does not always make it easy to fit in. People with disabilities receive the extra help and support they need as a way to give equal opportunities. Terrence, a self-advocate from Presque Isle says "People living with disabilities deserve a fair and equal opportunity, just like everyone else."

This crisis has caused increased challenges, but it is no different than the everyday challenges that must be solved on a daily basis. When all of the people involved in a student's life work together as a team, that student living with disabilities will have a more successful experience in school.

Rose, a self-advocate from Presque Isle states, "Being a person with a learning disability, these laws have helped me. No matter what education level you are in, elementary, middle school, high school, or even college, these laws give people with disabilities a chance to study and succeed."

We have attached a copy of the letter that was issued, of which our organization Speaking Up For Us signed onto. This letter explains the reasons we believe that additional waivers are not necessary, and that the laws and protections already in place, must be upheld completely.

We urge you to take this information into consideration and help protect the civil rights of students in Maine living with disabilities.

Sincerely,

Speaking Up For Us Self Advocates

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It is nobody's conscious choice to have a disability. It isn't like we just woke up one day and decided we are going to have a disability. Nicole

Should look at it from our perspective. WE are the people who have a disability.