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HOUSE DEMOCRATIC POLICY COMMITTEE

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House of Representatives
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE DEMOCRATIC POLICY COMMITTEE HEARING

Topic: Building Inclusive Disability Curriculum

G-50 Irvis Office Building – Harrisburg, PA

July 23, 2020

AGENDA

- 2:00 p.m. Welcome and Opening Remarks
- 2:10 p.m. Panel of Experts:
- Jamie Ray-Leonetti
Associate Director of Policy, Temple Institute on Disabilities
 - Alan Holdsworth
Director, Disability Equality in Education
 - Dr. Thomas Neuville
Professor and Disability Studies Advisor, Millersville University
 - ShaVon Savage
Deputy Chief-Office of Specialized Services, School District of Philadelphia
- 2:40 p.m. *Questions & Answers*
- 3:00 p.m. Panel of Advocates:
- Lisa Aquila
Home Care Worker and Disability Advocate
 - Nadine Silber
Autistic Activist and Disability Educator
 - Shawn Aleong
Student, Temple University
- 3:30 p.m. *Questions & Answers*
- 3:50 p.m. Closing Remarks

Disability Inclusive Education

Temple Institute on Disabilities

Testimony of Jamie Ray-Leonetti, Associate Director of Policy

July 23, 2020

Representative Hohenstein and members of the Democratic Policy Caucus, thank you for the opportunity to participate in today's hearing.

My name is Jamie Ray-Leonetti and I am the Associate Director of Policy at the Institute on Disabilities at Temple University, college of Education and Human Development. I am also a person with a disability. Without dating myself too much, I can tell you that I never heard of the "disability rights movement" until I was a college student in the mid-1990s. I went all through elementary school, middle school and high school without role models with disabilities from our history, and pretty much thinking "I am the only one who looks like me". Part of my reason for testifying here today is to ensure that my 7 year old nephew with Autism does not share my experience. I want him to grow up knowing it is ok to be disabled and proud.

Professionally, I am privileged to work at Pennsylvania's University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) Education, Research and Service. We are a statewide program. We are one of a network of 67 programs throughout the nation that are funded by the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities within the US Department of Health and Human Services to conduct training, service, technical assistance, research and dissemination activities on behalf of people with developmental disabilities in this Commonwealth. The Institute has been Pennsylvania's UCEDD since 1973.

Since 1999, the Institute on disabilities has collaborated with the PA Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) to conduct and analyze data from Independent Monitoring for Quality (IM4Q), a statewide initiative to assess the quality of life of people with intellectual disabilities and autism in PA. This initiative is part of a national effort called National Core Indicators, where 46 states participate. Through NCI state performance indicators have been developed and states measure their performance on these indicators.

The Institute also recognizes the importance of disability education and leadership development. This is evident in several of our programs including Leadership and Career Studies (LCS). LCS is a four-year certificate program providing young adults with intellectual disabilities an authentic, inclusive college experience while developing academic abilities, career aspirations, work skills and independence at Temple University. One of our LCS graduates, Shawn Aleong, will also share with you today about his experience and the importance of disability inclusive education in our schools.

Temple Institute on Disabilities supports the need for a Disability Inclusiveness Curriculum in all Pennsylvania schools. Specifically,

1. Disability is a natural part of the human experience. This month, we celebrate the 30th Anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Yet, 30 years after this important piece of legislation, a piece of legislation considered by many in the disability community to be our Declaration of Independence, Pennsylvania students do not learn about this day, or this law in school. Just as we learn about other Civil Rights, it is time to include disability rights in the curriculum.
2. According to 2016 data from the Pennsylvania Department of Education, 15.9 percent of students ages 6-21 have an Individualized Education Plan (www.datacenter.kidscount.org). These students deserve an education that includes their disability history.
3. According to the American Psychological Association, all children can benefit by talking openly about diversity. Further, for students in groups more likely to be the target of discrimination, such as students of color, or students with disabilities, these conversations are critical to reducing perceived discrimination that is often linked to anxiety, depression or physical health issues. (<https://www.apa.org/topics/kids-discrimination>)

The Institute on Disabilities stands ready to serve as a resource as work continues on this important piece of disability and education legislation. Thank you.

Testimony of Alan Holdsworth

Director of Disability Equality in Education

Thank you for letting me speak today. My name is Alan Holdsworth and I have been involved in developing inclusive practice since 1988 mainly in the UK and the USA. Opening the conversation about disability in the classroom and ending stigma is my last cause, my last issue and I hope our last victory together though you all will as my brother Justin would often say "Lead on."

The current situation

Disability...PA has one of the highest populations of people with disabilities in the USA at 23.9% (reference 1). Philadelphia has the highest disability rate of any city in the USA at 16% with 22% in poorer populations (reference 2). Yet of all the minority groups that make up our great diverse communities, Disability is the most misunderstood and least talked about. In fact we are invisible in education.

What does that invisibility mean and what are the consequences?

Disabled Children in the school setting are 1.5 times more likely to be bullied than their non disabled peers (reference 3). As adults we are unprepared and surprised by the criticisms that we and our families have over the policies and practices created without us. Today many families are dealing with the social exclusion of their young from K to 12 and beyond. Today the stigma of disability exists and is thriving as 70 percent of the deaths in PA are in inappropriate warehouses for our disabled citizens. Massed produced care does not apply to human beings in institutions here or anywhere; we are people not profit.

We have created through the invisibility of disability in education a mindset in our non disabled children of pity, patronage, helplessness, fear and ignorance such that means a disabled life is not worth a non disabled life. Invisibility in the curriculum leads all children into how they observe and then relate to their disabled peers.

Successful disabled students either succeed despite the system or as I don't want to be labelled as a disabled person and didn't need the support that many people needed I just wanted for the bullies to stop.

One of the main concepts that DEE has is that we have to address the whole school population and that the cause of stigma arises mainly in the non disabled population of a school community. All disabled and non disabled students need to learn what disability is for real. We live in a predominantly non disabled society where disabled people's employment remains at the same level it was 30 years ago. Political representation is almost nonexistent. Roosevelt still is not in his wheelchair.

The proposal

Our proposition and this bill does not solve all of this, but it is a start and a long term plan to be part of the solution.

Other states are beginning to do the same developing curriculum for their young people. (See appendix 1).

In their perpetual wisdom the Pennsylvania Developmental Disabilities Council funded through the stigma grant and Disability Equality in Education (DEE) was born on July 1st 2017.

DEE is the first disabled led organization in PA to be focused on Education through a disability lens. We achieve this through extensive peer review and our connections to the disability rights movement. This ensures that whatever material and resources we create or recommend have the approval of a wide range of disabled people. In that they convey an accurate and educational message. This bill would allow us to build capacity in the organization ensuring that the voice of disabled people is heard throughout the Commonwealth at conferences and professional development events.

Over the past 3 years we have developed a curriculum for K through 12 which includes disability and are continuing to do this on a weekly basis. We also have an ever growing education advocacy forum of 320 + most of

whom are people with disabilities in the education field. Here is a link to our website <https://disabilityequalityeducation.org/>

The two points I am making is that there is already a curriculum as well as other resources on our website. Secondly and most importantly the content has been through the lens of the disability community.

It would be preposterous to imagine curriculum for the civil rights movement drawn up by caucasians only, so it would be that a disability curriculum be drawn up predominantly by non disabled people.

Consequently, we are already 3 years into this idea and await the Dept of Education to partner with us.

The curriculum

On the DEE website we have a collection of lesson plans that help to educate students on the stigma of disability, the history of the movement, and historical figures that had a disability. These lesson plans range from guided discussion, to presentations, writing assignments, reading assignments, and many more activities. The second goal is to help teachers by creating lesson plans they can use with no-strings attached. We have lesson plans that can fit for just about any school subject, from English lessons, to math lessons, and even art and music lessons. Our curriculum can help teachers introduce students to new topics while also helping them save lesson planning time.

Other resources we offer include:

A growing recommended book list for all ages and reading levels.

A video resource that can be used in the classroom.

Links to other great resources from around the world.

Ideas for assemblies and disability weeks

Professional development webinars

Our Idea and this proposed legislation is simple, affordable and liberating for teachers and educators. We want young children and young adults to talk about disability throughout the educational experience. Using the resources we are still developing we can open up the conversation about disability in the classroom thus demystifying it and ending the stigma of disability in our next generation.

Our proposal and the Bill are part of the process of uniting all minorities into our children's educational experience. It is not about politics, it is about as my compatriot Elvis Costello calls "Peace, love and understanding."

Education departments across the country have successfully developed and have already incorporated some minority and discriminated groups into the curriculum. We believe that all minorities should now be included which also contains disability.

We learn about the Civil Rights movement, we learn about the Women's movement now it's time to learn about the disability movement. The good news is that the Department of Education having achieved a curriculum for those movements, has a process they can model to achieve ours.

We would be intrigued to hear the case for the continued exclusion of our history and the invisibility of disability in K through 12 education.

On behalf of disabled students everywhere thank you for listening to us.

References

1. <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/impacts/pennsylvania.html>
2. <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2018/07/17/disability-rate-in-philadelphia-is-highest-of-largest-us-cities>
3. <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2017/01/18/incident-highlights-bullying-risk-for-those-with.html>

Department of Educational
Foundations
Stayer Hall 426
Phone: 717-871-4880

Dear Committee Members

Re: Disability Inclusiveness Curriculum Act.

Thank you for allowing me to discuss with you the critical importance of the Article known as the **Disability Inclusive Curriculum act.**

In a time when we need all of us to make life better for each of us, this Act is a timely gift.

When I was a young boy in 1959 and growing up in Appleton, Wisconsin, there was a man who spent his time on College Avenue. This man with no legs could be found on the sidewalk next to Prange's Department store. My mother, a robust shopper, loved Prange's Department store. I always thought that mom never noticed this man as she moved with intent inside, where she had securely hidden items on sale. One day, I did what all young children do, I said, "Mom, what happened to that man's legs?" "Shhh, don't look at him...we'll go to Walgreens later and have lunch at the counter". That last bit about lunch at the Walgreen's counter was an oft used distraction.

That day, I was initiated into a silent culture of ableist thinking. The unconscious and unintentional assumption that disabled people yearn to be non-disabled, can never quite measure up, and are a bit of a burden to an otherwise productive society.

Later, in 1984, Gary and I became friends. I was working as a rehabilitation counselor responsible for getting people jobs. Gary had just left a 40-year residence at a Wyoming institution for the "Mentally Retarded". I was his rehabilitation counselor and we lived together. Gary was gifted at using tools and aspired to work in manufacturing. I approached the CEO of a Medical Components company on behalf of Gary. I gave them my usual pitch about Gary's skills, his strong character, and will to work. The CEO leaned back and told me of positions available on the factory floor. Perfect. "But" the CEO added, "we need real work done here and I don't think we can risk Gary getting hurt or hurting others".

The silent culture of ableism had brought this CEO the mindset that people with disability held less value, could not be productive, and constituted a case for charity & pity. My mother and that CEO are not to blame and yet they are the problem. Gary went on to work there for 20 years. ☺

When I speak of inclusive education PK-12 or the slow-to-open doors of higher education and the well documented negative implications of segregated classrooms often people will say things like, "Having those children in typical classrooms is a great aspiration, but what about the other children?" From centuries prior to 1959, through the 1980's and into today the silent culture of ableism has caused ignorance and harm. It is time to put an end to the silence and ignorance through knowledge and education.

When we know each other, we protect each other and a Disability Inclusiveness Curriculum Act will bring us to see what has been there all the time.

Thousands of heroes, leaders, inventors, artists, and scientists with disabilities wait to fill the silent pages of our history books. Millions of mothers, fathers, lovers, and religious leaders are waiting to break the silence and tell their stories.

I, Millersville University, and all the institutions of higher education, stand ready with our communities to provide education in disability inclusiveness for professional educators.

As I prepared to write this testimony, I started by consulting the literature. I always tell my students to be clear on what must be said and be sure to check the facts. I conducted a search of the literature on Afrocentric and disability-centric curriculum.

Afrocentric curriculum considers historic contributions and when the current curriculum is examined, we find a design plagued by curriculums of exclusion and cultural confusion. The remedy is to “unschool” society by centering ourselves in the best of African and African-American culture. To change what is by telling the full truths of what was. This is known as the “social model” of continuous improvement. The problem lies within all of us as a society. What needs fixing is society in order to give citizens the knowledge and thinking power to free our better angels.

Disabled centric curriculum is driven by historic contributions and when we look closely at the current curriculum, we find one that is also plagued by exclusion and cultural confusion. And worse, the entire curriculum is aimed only at fixing, changing, and altering each student with a disability to match more perfectly the non-disabled ideal. This is known as the “Medical Model of Disability”. The belief that people can only experience more desirable futures by themselves being made better or more “ordinary”. In essence, this is education aimed at equipping citizens with disabilities for a life well lived by causing each to be non-disabled. An absurd and unobtainable objective. An objective that has the “elimination strategy” as the only resolution for people who are seen as a problem.

The Disability Inclusive Curriculum Act has at its core, not eliminating people or their culture, but erasing old beliefs and mindsets of teachers, educators, school boards, community leaders, and society as a whole. The social-model of continuous improvement. We must change what is learned by changing what is taught so that the first discussion will not be “of what value are you?” & “What must be changed about you?”

Thank you for passing Disability Inclusive Curriculum Act and making us all stronger together.

Very truly yours,

Thomas J. Neville

Thomas J. Neville, PhD - Professor

[Disability Studies Advisor](#)

Faculty Advisor – [Integrated Studies](#)

Principal Investigator – [Office of Postsecondary Education funded TPSID](#)

[Educational Foundations](#)

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Thomas Neuville is Professor of Special Education and Disability Studies in the Department of Educational Foundations at Millersville University in Millersville, PA. He has more than forty years' experience in education, community, and organizational development. He is recognized internationally for preserving and archiving the work of [Dr. Wolf Wolfensberger](#) in video format. Dr. Neuville's keynote address, [40 Years of Inclusion in North America](#), at the International Inclusion Conference at Moscow State University in Moscow Russia, continues to be used internationally.

Dr. Neuville's current work is centered on designing coherent models of planning and program development within the systems of Education. Specifically, he is working with teacher candidates to develop strategies that are founded on social justice and focused on true personalization. He serves as founder and Faculty Administrator of [Integrated Studies](#), an inclusive post-secondary program for students with intellectual disability at Millersville. Dr. Neuville created and serves as advisor for the first approved [BA-MDST – Applied Disability Studies](#) at Millersville University. He also serves as Principal Investigator – [Office of Postsecondary Education funded TPSID](#) and the [PA Inclusive Higher Education Consortium](#)

Written Testimony
July 23, 2020

It is an honor to be here before you today to discuss the importance of this legislation and the benefits of the proposed curriculum for **all** students.

During the 2019-2020 school year, The School District of Philadelphia served more than 203,000 students, with around 17% of those students receiving special education support and services, and numerous other students receiving accommodations through Section 504 Service Plans. That means more than 35,000 students in our district have a disability.

Students need to see themselves in the staff and faculty that support them daily, and in the materials that they use to learn from. This legislation will be impactful not just on students that have disabilities and diverse learning needs, but also their peers. All of our students need to see themselves reflected in our curriculum materials. We need to acknowledge the contributions of those with differing abilities and backgrounds to our society, and do so in a way that is fully inclusive, and not separate or apart from, our regular curriculum. We need to elevate this for our children.

An important part of this legislation focuses on supporting our teaching staff in implementing the new curriculum and providing the support and training necessary to be effective, intentional and thorough in its implementation. Supporting teachers in embedding this curriculum in their daily instruction will be vital to the purpose of the legislation.

This legislation will impact how our students who have disabilities see themselves, and how their peers see them as well. These proposed shifts in our curriculum will also support the work The School District of Philadelphia is currently engaged in, centering our work through the lens of equity. It is our endeavor to ensure that all of our students see themselves in the curriculum and are represented appropriately. When all of our students feel seen, heard and included, we will see the most benefits of the work we are all currently doing to honor and respect each other's differences and contributions.

Testimony of Lisa Aquila
Home Care Worker
Disability Advocate

Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today my name is Lisa Aquila

I live in the 177th councilmanic District in the Bridesburg section of Northeast Philadelphia.

I am a mother, wife and a home care worker. I've been an advocate for the independent living movement since the early 1990s.

In 2007 I had the opportunity for the first time to visit the Center for Independent Living (Liberty Resources) with one of my consumers I provide care for.

It is at that time that I became fascinated with the history of the disability rights movement for in that building there were conference rooms named after Wade Blank & Justin Dart. There were many plaques and photographs displayed in the Halls at the center of individuals who are true history makers. I wondered to myself why haven't I heard of these people before?

Why haven't I or any children learned about them in school?

I did some research on my own and became more and more impressed with the stories behind the names & faces I came to know in visiting the CIL.

As I explored further I found that whenever you search an image for the signing of the ADA you will see President Bush seated next to two Men in wheelchairs. (just google it)

Can anyone here tell me the names of these men? Their names are Lex Frieden and Justin Dart Jr.

Lex Frieden is an American educator, author, & policy maker and has been called the "architect of the ADA"

reference 1:

Lex Frieden:

<https://tinyurl.com/yb9pe88l>

Justin Dart Jr. is the reason the ADA became a reality in fact he is known as the "father of the ADA"

Did you know his wheelchair is on display in the Constitution Center right here in the city of Philadelphia?

I liked to share one of Justin Dart's favorite quotes by Dr. Martin Luther King who said "an injustice anywhere affects Justice everywhere." Therefore, I feel it would be a true Injustice if our children never had the chance to learn about him and the contributions of his peers people like: **Ed Roberts, Wade Blank** and

Judy Heumann and so many others involved in the rich history of the disability rights movement for their stories can only enlighten and motivate students disabled and non-disabled to become all they can be in life!

Reference 2:

Justin Dart Jr. 2017 Documentary

<https://youtu.be/54sxGGArMIk>

Reference 3:

Ed Roberts:

[https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ed_Roberts_\(activist\)](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ed_Roberts_(activist))

Reference 4:

Wade Blank

(1) <https://tinyurl.com/y9e4dx3l>

movie: when you remember me:

(2) https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/When_You_Remember_Me

Reference 5:

Judith Heumann:

(1) https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judith_Heumann

(2) <https://tinyurl.com/y8ymc7moh>

I firmly believe that it would be a disservice to students and teachers of the Commonwealth if they did not take advantage of all the resources and opportunities offered through all that Disability Equality In Education has to offer. This a free resource to dispel bullying & negative attitudes & stereotypes toward people with disabilities.

The promise of including disability history in the curriculum is one that will empower our youth with the knowledge that:

equality is a human right...

and that my friends is something we cannot learn enough about!

Why every student needs this:

Wouldn't you agree that teaching students how disabled people were treated in the past could reduce discrimination in the future.

Giving our kids opportunities to develop a deep appreciation for the diversity that makes up our great city can only create unity and acceptance among them.

Anyone can become Disabled:

We all come from different backgrounds.

We should be proud of who we are and where we came from. Right?

And so, we should learn about our ancestry, our culture and we should learn about other people's culture and ancestry as well.

The rich history that makes up our diverse society is important to all of us.

It's important to learn about in our schools.

However there's one group that we don't learn enough about.

It's a group of people that anyone and everyone can become a part of. Regardless of their ancestry or culture Religious beliefs, sexual orientation or political party.

We have no control over joining this group.

The only thing required in becoming a member of that group is that you must have a common thread that we all share. That is being a part of the human race.

You can't prepare for it.

Or have a choice if you're in it.

But you can learn about it.

You may never be a part of that group. But I can guarantee you that someone you know or love will be a part of that group

At some point in their lives.

It may be a parent, a grandparent, a sibling, a child - your child, a neighbor or a friend, a classmate, a member of your sports team, your favorite entertainer - television or movie actress or actor, your favorite superhero...

That group is made up of persons with disabilities - the disability community.

Take for example Christopher Reeve

He was an actor, a husband, a father and a friend. He was superman. We all have one thing in common with Christopher Reeves: we are all human beings.

On May 27 1995 Christopher Reeve was an actor, a father, a husband, a friend he was the same person as he was on May 26 th 1995.

Except for one thing on May 27th 1995 Christopher Reeve fell off his horse and obtained a severe spinal cord injury which left him paralyzed. Christopher Reeve was an actor, a father, a husband, a friend. Superman was the same person as he was May 27 as he was the day before.

But.. Before he was any of these things Superman was just a man.

Doesn't it make sense to provide opportunities in our classrooms that will allow students to see the person first and not the disability.

In schools we learn about different communities. So why not the disability community?

The message I send to all of you today is to remember one thing: anyone can become just like Superman.....

Anyone can become a part of the disability community.

So I ask you to become a superhero to fight stigma in our schools for a better world.

reference 6:

<https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/07/27/7-facts-about-americans-with-disabilities/%3famp=1>

Empowerment through History

History gives us the tools to think about us—whoever that us is—as being part of something bigger; we have a past, which means that we have a present and a future.

Because disability has been ignored for so long, it's important for all students to learn that it played an important part, not just because of a few important people who defined a movement, but also for how we think about things like: friendships, employment, education, accessibility, independence and opportunity. The impact of how our nation establishes leadership, pride, perseverance and dignity.

One of the most important threads of the American story is the development of civil rights and increasing social acceptance in groups of Americans who have been historically discriminated against.

Our schools have a responsibility to tell this story fully and accurately so that when students graduate from our schools they are fully prepared to participate in our diverse society.

It is in our classrooms that we can cultivate and empower our students with a new attitude that will make a difference for all.

Fueling self esteem & determination in all our kids.

Please invite **Disability Equality in Education** in our classrooms now.

Thank You.

Nadine M. Silber is an Autistic activist and disability educator. She holds an undergraduate degree in education and a Juris Doctor. She is a writer, public speaker, consultant and a proud mother of two sons who are, likewise, members of the Autistic community.

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to address you on this important matter. My name is Nadine Silber and I am a resident of Ardmore, Montgomery County. I am a former public interest lawyer and child advocate. For the past decade I have been a Disability Rights advocate, activist and educator.

I was identified as having learning disabilities as a child, and was the recipient of supplemental educational supports throughout my schooling. In law school, I was properly diagnosed as being Autistic. I am the mother of two wonderful sons, who are likewise Autistic, and are enrolled in the Lower Merion school district. I am testifying in support of this legislation because I believe that including disability studies in the public school curriculum could have a significant positive impact on the lives of disabled Pennsylvanians

Research suggests that individuals with disabilities may have increased vulnerability to mistreatment because of society's response to the disability, rather than the disability itself.¹ In other words, how we are perceived is predictive of how well we will be treated by others. And presently, others have a limited means to form accurate perceptions of disabled people.

Unless they have a disabled family member, most people likely form their impressions of disabled people through the images they see in the media. When disabled people are visible in the media at all, we are generally stereotyped. Often we are portrayed as objects of pity, or alternatively, as courageously inspiring merely for living our lives. In either instance, we are viewed as less valuable. Devaluation robs us of our dignity and can lead to significant negative outcomes.

As I mentioned I am an Autistic woman. I also have a diagnosis of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Research indicates that Autistic individuals may be at increased risk for developing PTSD from various forms of mistreatment, including bullying.² Another recent study of Autistic women found a correlation between masking Autistic traits and development of mental health challenges such as depression and anxiety.³ I can tell you firsthand that it's very stressful to have to try to hide your autism to fit in and avoid being bullied. If we could just be accepted and valued for who we are, our lives could be so much easier. Our self confidence and self worth could develop so much more. Our outcomes could improve significantly.

One thing I have discovered through my work as a Disability Rights activist is that I have many common shared experiences with people who have completely different disabilities. Autistic people have a place, not only within our own community, but also in the greater Disability community. I am proud of the role that disabled people have played in American history. I believe that if more people knew about what we have contributed to society, they would view us differently, and then they would include us and accept us more often. Kids

are not born with biases and misconceptions. If you want to improve our lives and help us to be accepted and valued, you can start by teaching kids that we are not the stereotypes they see in the media. You can normalize our lived experience by teaching kids about ableism and about equality and access.

I would like to close by sharing a personal anecdote which I believe illustrates my point well. A few years ago, my son, Ethan, broke his leg and had to spend a couple of days in St. Christopher's Hospital for Children in Philadelphia. He shared a room with a very nice little boy named, Jamal. Jamal was happy to have company and he wanted to talk to Ethan. Ethan, however, does not speak fluently, so he couldn't chat with Jamal. I explained that to Jamal but also showed him how he could tell that Ethan was interested and happy to know him too. Jamal was fine with that and he kept on chatting away to Ethan. He even brought over his video game to show him and was happy to let Ethan push the buttons. Later that day, Jamal's brothers and sisters came in to visit. Jamal introduced them to Ethan and they did not care at all that Ethan didn't communicate, interact or play the same way. They still shared with him and included him. I was so impressed that I took a moment to tell their mom that I thought she had really wonderfully friendly kids and that I loved the fact that they were so inclusive. She said, "Oh, they know all kinds of people." And I realized at that moment, more than ever, how important it was to have kids "know all kinds of people". Please support this legislation so kids can learn to know their disabled peers better.

1 Sobsey, D. (1994). *Violence and abuse in the lives of people with disabilities*. MD: Paul Brookes Pub., Inc.

2 Rumball, F., Happé, F., Grey, N. (2020). Experience of trauma and PTSD symptoms in autistic adults: Risk of PTSD development following DSM-5 and non-DSM-5 traumatic life events. *Autism Research*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.2306>

3 Beck, J. S., Lundwall, R. A., Gabrielsen, T., Cox, J. C., & South, M. (2020). Looking good but feeling bad: "Camouflaging" behaviors and mental health in women with autistic traits. *Autism*, 24(4), 809–821. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361320912147>

Testimony of Shawn Aleong

July 23, 2020

Representative Hohenstein and members of the Democratic Policy Caucus, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about the importance of disability history education in schools. I am honored to be here to participate in this Hearing as part of Virtual Disability Pride PA 2020.

My name is Shawn Aleong. I am a disability rights advocate and a proud member of both the disability community and the African American Community. I am a graduate of Temple Institute on Disabilities Leadership and Career Studies program and I am currently a fully matriculated student at Temple University.

I support the Disability Inclusiveness curriculum because my own personal experience as a young, African-American male with a disability. A disability inclusiveness curriculum is important in all of our Pennsylvania schools because:

1. As a young person in school, I was often bullied because of my disability. Kids with disabilities should not have to face this. I believe that if other kids were exposed to disability and taught about disability, bullying would be reduced.
2. Even today, 30 years after passage of the American's with Disabilities Act, our society still views people with disabilities as "different". A main reason that disability is not part of the mainstream is that disability is not part of our standard education curriculum, we are not taught about important pieces of disability history such as "the capitol crawl" or the significance of July 26, 1990.

3. The Bill being proposed here includes a pilot program for schools and a specific disability curriculum. This is important because it is a step toward making our schools more inclusive.

4. Finally, I want to share something about the intersection between race and disability. As a member of the African American Community, I want to share that there is still a stigma around being a person of color with a disability. We as people of color with disabilities are “labeled” and often discriminated against just because we look or sound different. This needs to stop, and this Bill will go a long way toward eliminating stigma and discrimination.

I thank you again for the opportunity to testify today, and I want to leave you with a quote from Thurgood Marshall. In recognizing that we are all human beings, Justice Marshall said, “in recognizing the humanity of our fellow beings, we pay ourselves the highest tribute.”