

EXHIBIT 10
DATE 2-16-15
HB 451

Madame Chair and committee members thank you for your consideration. My son Hayes was born with Down syndrome. He just turned seven years old and is in Kindergarten in Bozeman. It is a wonderful school and I am thrilled with the teachers and staff that work with my child.

My husband and I opted to have Hayes complete a second year of Kindergarten because he had not mastered the skills needed for entering first grade. Many people urged us to push him onto first grade because they were worried that he would not complete school by age 19 when he would be forced out of the public school system. We chose to base our decision on what would be best for Hayes educationally now, not 12 years from now. Because we kept Hayes in kindergarten, he is now on grade level proudly reading and writing with his classmates rather than hopelessly behind. Had we heeded to the fear of being cut off from services at age 19, Hayes would be spending the majority of his day in a special ed classroom or working one on one with an aide requiring a lot more school resources.

I have high expectations for my son Hayes, and I know he will complete his high school education. I also know that he will need those two extra years of school to successfully transition from school to working in the community. Hayes didn't walk until he was well over two, didn't talk until he was three and couldn't write his name until he was six. These milestones were reached long after typically developing children, but he still achieved the same goals. Hayes will graduate from high school, but not surprisingly, it may take him a little longer than a typical child.

I hope to be able to continue to make educational decisions for my child based on his educational needs, not because of fear that he will not finish in time. Those two extra years are critical to Hayes and all special needs children to become successful and productive members of our community.

Please vote for House Bill 451 to ensure our children are not left without the skills they need to be successful members of our communities. Thank you for your time.

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