



Dear State Representatives,

Story/M.Miller

I am a 17 year old student who attends East High School. I have visited the Iowa State Capitol during the legislative session for the last two years. I just want to be heard and to have a voice for those who don't. The few minutes that we get with you as you pass from meeting to meeting is never enough. Never enough time to explain the daily struggles and obstacles that students with mental disabilities face. I am an older sister of two younger siblings who have a mental disability that affects not only their academic performance but also completing simple everyday task.

Throughout my life not only as a student but a big sister, I have had to sit back and watch them struggle because of the lack of resources. At the time I was we learned about anxiety I was a fifth grader and my sister was a first grader at the time. My family was new to the concept of what anxiety could mean. The anxiety would cause my sister to cry when she was at school or even just when feeling nervous. Anxiety is like this monster that lives with you that makes you do things that you would not normally do. When she would cry, I would then be pulled out of class to calm her down simply because of the lack of support and resources. Never once did I complain about being there for my sister in that time, but I never truly understood why there was no one else to support her in the building other than her sister.

The amount of training and understanding given to teachers to help support students just like my sister lacks tremendously. For example, there was a time when my sister was crying and was then

forced to write apology letters to classes pre-K through fifth at my school for something she just couldn't control. I would then read the letter as I sat surrounded by my classmates on the carpet listening to this. I am now 17 and can fully comprehend what happened that day but still can't figure out why that happened. If we took a second to hear these experiences then just maybe we would put more money and resources into training and finding better ways to support these students.

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Medication is also strongly pushed upon parents with students with a mental disability. My eight year old brother is a kind, loving bundle of joy that just struggles to sit still. My brother was diagnosed with ADHD in 2016 in his first grade year. The moment this became known, medication was pushed immediately and he was looked at differently because of his impulsiveness. We have tried multiple medications to help him become more “normal” but is medication really the best idea or is it just because we again have a lack of support and resources to support these

students so we force medication? The medication will calm them down for only so many hours but what many individuals don't know is that ADHD is a blessing in disguise. That energy that is brought out helps show their true personality. The love and compassion that is shown and given just helps someone understand that even though they struggle to sit down or slow down doesn't make them any less than anyone else. Even after a tiring day I always look forward to seeing my brother especially on the bad days because his energy always takes me away from the negative things that are going on.

Last year I got the opportunity to come up to the Capitol and try to tell my story and help get the support I want to not only help my siblings but other families and friends that are affected and for those who don't have a voice or no parents to really advocate for them like my parents have. When I went up there I had a purpose and was determined to be heard.

Little did I know how long and hard it was to get a representative's attention. I was then told to make it short and “just get to the point” but something so important and so connecting to some individuals can be hard to sum up so much in so little time. Take a minute and just think about what if this was one of your loved ones.

Sincerely, Maddie Miller