

House Committee on Education

January 15, 2024 Testimony on HB2203

Good Afternoon Chair Estes, Vice Chair McNorton, Ranking Minority Member Stogdill and Members of the Committee:

Hello, my name is Alex Nussbaum, my legal name is Olga of Pirogova Olga Vladimirovna. I was born and adopted from Ivanovo, Russia. I will be 25 on the 21st of March. April, 2023 was when I got diagnosed with FASD (Fetal Alcohol spectrum disorder). I may not have as many accomplishments as Kat Meinhardt but I have a few! Singing Vivaldi Gloria in Carnegie hall freshman year; all female choir and placing 4th in an international Festival located in Llandovery Wales with the same choir my junior year. I am also an accomplished equestrian thanks to my adopted mom's encouragement and love of horses.

Now that you've learned a little bit about me, let's talk about how education affects people with FASD. First thing is for teachers and other school staff: We want to learn, but many of us need a different approach. When someone gets frustrated or impatient because we don't understand a topic right away - or because we're distracted by something that seems small - it doesn't help. In fact, it makes things worse. We're often more frustrated than you are because we genuinely want to learn and grow. But when we hit a wall, we don't always have the tools or support to climb over it on our own.

For Students with FASD, learning differences are neurological, not behavioral. What may look like laziness, defiance, or lack of effort is often a brain-based disability. Without proper understanding and training, Students like me get mislabeled, punished, or even left behind because the system wasn't designed with us in mind. We are very capable and HB2203 will help others to see that.

When Students with FASD receive the right support, we can accomplish anything like competing internationally, sing on world-class stages, and overall pursuing dreams and ambitions. We may have struggles along the way but with the right help, we can shoot for the moon or go beyond our own limitations.

Thank you for listening and I will stand for questions.

Alex Nussbaum