

My name is Crystal Ton. I live in Virginia Beach and my son, Jackson, is in the 8th grade. Jackson's comprehensive needs are so great that he has resided at St. Mary's Home for Disabled Children for the past 7 years, and, just this year, is able to attend a community-based school in his home district of Virginia Beach. Jackson was very fortunate that he came to the facility with his own ACC device; but, even though most of the residents of St. Mary's and similar facilities in Virginia can't speak, few are given access and support to learn to use AAC devices.

In my experience, there is a prevalent belief that students and individuals with significant speech and motor disabilities are so intellectually disabled that they are incapable of complex communication and unable to learn to communicate using AAC, which could not be farther from the truth.

My son was 8 before he independently called me 'mom' with aid of his 'talker', as we call his ACC device. It's a day, I will never forget, a day that would have never been possible without his ACC device.

I urge you to support HB 1047 so that students like Jackson aren't denied the essential communication tools they need to thrive, due to outdated and biased assumptions about their abilities, and adults who work with children with ACC needs are given the proper training and support to encourage each student's success.

