



January 28, 2026

Dear Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services Staff:

My name is Kayla McKeon, and I am the Manager of Public Policy at the National Down Syndrome Society (NDSS). In my role, I advocate for public policies that help individuals with Down syndrome thrive, and I am the first registered federal lobbyist with Down syndrome. Thank you for hosting this listening session to hear from members of the community about the impacts of potential changes to the Department of Education.

I began my K-12 education shortly after the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was passed. While this law guaranteed a free appropriate public education for students with Down syndrome and other disabilities, I was still placed in a self-contained classroom in the basement of my school, separate from students without disabilities. My family and I had to advocate for me to be included and, luckily, I was. The services and supports I received while learning alongside my peers have helped me grow into the successful advocacy professional I am today.

NDSS opposes any efforts to move special education programs out of the Department of Education. IDEA was passed so that students with disabilities could be included in their classrooms and access any services they may need to succeed in school. For that reason, these programs belong in a federal agency that is dedicated to improving educational outcomes for students with disabilities. Moving the oversight for IDEA to a different federal agency could change the goals of the program. This will create confusion about the civil rights protections we are guaranteed by law. **Federal law requires strong federal oversight.**

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) was established within the Department of Education to make sure that states were educating students with disabilities properly. Before OSEP was established, many students with disabilities were not receiving any form of education. The current system is not perfect and needs reform, but moving federal oversight and weakening the systems that ensure us our civil rights is not the answer.

**If we want more people with disabilities to meaningfully participate in and contribute to society, we need a strong federal system that ensures equal opportunities in the classroom.** Moving special education oversight to another federal agency puts that at risk.

Thank you for considering my views and the views of my team at NDSS.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kayla McKeon", is written in a cursive style.

Kayla McKeon  
Manager of Public Policy  
National Down Syndrome Society