Title graphic. Disability Law Center, and logo.

Chris Griffin, executive director of Disability Law Center, speaks in her office.

♫ uplifting music ♫

Chris: Hi everybody, and thanks for coming to

the Disability Law Center's annual fundraiser,

and a special thanks to those of you that

have sponsored our event tonight.

Most of you know by now that this is my last fundraiser,

and while some of you may be jumping for joy that

Chris Griffin won't be calling you next year

asking you for money, the reality is I know you

give because of the great work that the Law Center

and the attorneys here do on behalf of

people with disabilities.

So please dig as deep as you can tonight

because we do great work on behalf of

people with disabilities in Massachusetts.

Here are just a few of the stories that illustrate

the work that we do and the people that do this work.

Thank you.

Title. Aiden Augustin. Mattapan, Massachusetts. Photo of a young boy standing next to his mother.

An older woman shows the boy how to play notes on an electric piano.

Pamela: My name is Pamela Coveney,

I'm a senior attorney at DLC.

Pamela is interviewed in her office.

Ms. Augustin came to DLC

about two and a half years ago

and she had a boy, Aiden

who was having trouble at school.

He was getting into a lot of trouble that she felt

was related to some disabilities that he'd been

diagnosed with, and initially,

she asked for special education services

and the school declined.

Marie: My name is Marie Augustin,

I live in Mattapan, Massachusetts.

Aiden: My name is Aiden Augustin

and I live in Mattapan, Massachusetts.

Marie and Aiden are interviewed in their living room.

Marie: They put him in a regular classroom

but almost immediately I was getting an average

of four or five phone calls per day.

Most times they would tell me to just come pick him up.

Aiden.

Aiden: I was frustrated and mad and upset.

Pamela

Pamela: The overall problem is that sometimes there's

a misunderstanding or a failure to acknowledge

the nexus between a diagnosed disability

and certain kinds of behavior.

Marie.

Marie: They had a couple of occasions where they were

physically restraining Aiden for some of his actions.

At one point they started pouring water down his face

and he had indicated that he couldn't breathe,

and they said it was because they

needed to cool him down.

Pamela: In addition to the disciplinary problems

and the way they were responding, they weren't doing

anything to help him keep up with his schoolwork

when he was out of school.

Marie: I was very concerned that academically he was

gonna continue to fall behind.

Pamela: When a child in Massachusetts is suspended,

the school has a legal obligation to help the child

make educational progress,

and that wasn't happening with Aiden.

Marie: I called the DLC, I went in with Aiden

and we spoke to Ms. Coveney.

She went to the school with us, she wrote letters,

I mean, it,

and, a big chunk of it honestly,

was helping me figure out what I needed to do.

Structuring what I needed to do when I was

dealing with the school directly.

Pamela: Eventually, I helped to arrange for Aiden to

get into another school.

Marie: We're at Holmes Elementary School which is a

much better fit for us.

Aiden: They have a gym.

Marie: They have a gym, yes Aiden is very adamant.

That was the first thing he loved when we went to

go visit, they have a gym.

Throughout the day they're able to take breaks,

so that they are able to go back and focus.

So, we went from thirty days of suspension,

I can't even count how many phone calls, to

almost none.

Aiden: I think this new school is a good fit for me.

Marie: Yes, and thanks to DLC that we got that,

so thank you for the work that they do.

Pamela: It's why I get up every day and it's why I'll

continue to get up every day.

It's some of the most validating work

that I've ever done.

Title. Cheryl Quintal, Lowell, Massachusetts. Photo of Cheryl smiling.

Cheryl is interviewed in a conference room and uses sign language. We hear an interpreter as she signs.

Cheryl: Hello, I'm Cheryl Quintal,

and I'm from Lowell, Massachusetts.

I'm Caitlin Parton, I'm a staff attorney at

Disability Law Center in Boston, Massachusetts.

Caitlin is interviewed in her office.

Cheryl contacted our office,

she had been discriminated against

by a department store.

She tried to pay her bill over the phone

and they wouldn't let her.

Cheryl.

Cheryl: I have two phones, one for hearing people,

and one for Deaf people, for me.

Shot of Cheryl using a video phone.

Caitlin: With a video phone, if you're calling

a hearing person,

there's an interpreter on

the phone who's able to interpret the call for you

and they sign the conversation so that you can have

seamless communication.

The customer service representative that Cheryl

spoke with refused to take her call on a video phone

because there was a third party on the line.

Cheryl: I asked, "How do you communicate

with Deaf people on the phone?"

They told me to call through TTY but I don't have a TTY.

I only have VP, video phone.

Caitlin: It's not good customer service and it's certainly

not legal to say, "You can't use a video phone

because there's a third party on the line,

call us back with a TTY."

Where there's also a third party on the line.

The policy doesn't make sense in practice

and it should be changed.

I'm sure the department store has plenty

of other languages available over the phone,

it's no problem for hearing foreign language users,

but it's still a problem for Deaf people.

I yelled to DLC to come to the rescue.

Caitlin: I tried working directly

with the department store.

Unfortunately, that didn't really go anywhere

so we decided to file with the

Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination.

We also filed a complaint with

the Department of Justice, Disability Rights Section

alleging violations of the

American's with Disabilities Act.

And both of those actions are still ongoing.

Cheryl: It feels good that DLC decided to help me,

I was thrilled.

I can't imagine what would have happened

if they didn't help.

Title. Daniel McLean, East Longmeadow, Massachusetts. Photo of a young man in a wheelchair next to his father.

Shot of a young man being wheeled down the ramp of an accessible van. He types into a speech device.

Daniel: Hi, my name is Daniel.

James: My name is James McLean,

this is my son Daniel.

We've been together for almost 25 years.

Daniel and James are interviewed in their living room.

Dan was originally in a workshop program but then

the laws changed and he was really no longer eligible

to be in such a program so he was switching to a

community based day program.

Erin: My name is Erin Hehn O'Sullivan,

I'm a staff attorney here at DLC.

Erin is interviewed in her office.

Dan came to DLC, he was in a sheltered workshop

and really wanted to get into a program that would

allow him to access the community.

His parents had been trying to find a program

and they did, however the program didn't have a

wheelchair accessible van and therefore Dan,

who uses a wheelchair could not go.

James.

James: They did have someone else there who I believe

would stay behind on various trips

and that just didn't seem right to us so we called Erin.

Erin: DLC wrote a demand letter to the state asking

the state or the program to provide an accessible van

under several different federal laws.

Shot of Daniel being wheeled by his father into an accessible van.

After a few back and forth communications,

they did in fact provide a van to the program

which allowed Dan to go, and he loves it.

Erin holds up a photo of Daniel, smiling, outside an accessible van.

He gets to go in the community now several

days a week, interact with peers

and other community members and

he's really having a great time.

James: He really does enjoy it,

rather than just sitting in a room being bored, and

looking at a computer all day or something like that,

he actually gets out.

Daniel.

Daniel: Bowling.

James: That's right, and where else?

Daniel: Swimming pool.

James: Yeah.

Erin: Dan and his parents are really incredible people.

To be able to help means a lot, that's

it's why we do the work we do here at DLC,

we really believe that an individual should

not be denied access to their community

due to their disability,

and that's what was happening to Dan,

and it's not anymore.

Title. Helen Dempsey, Holyoke, Massachusetts. Photo of a young girl with a pink dollhouse behind her.

The girl is interviewed in her bedroom.

Helen: My name is Helen,

I live in Holyoke, Massachusetts.

Michelle: My name is Michelle Dempsey.

I live in Holyoke, Mass. I'm Helen's mother.

Aquila: I'm Aquila Dempsey, Helen's father,

Michelle's husband.

Aquila and Michelle are interviewed from their living room.

Michelle: She was really struggling in her old school.

It was not a school that was equipped for

hard of hearing children.

Helen.

Helen: It was really noisy and I didn't like it.

So I can't study.

Stefanie: My name is Stefanie Krantz, I'm an attorney

at the Disability Law Center and I work

out of the Northampton, Mass office.

Stefanie is interviewed in her office.

Helen has a substantial hearing loss

and she is able to hear

but it needs to be a quiet environment.

Because of the noise level and the fact that there

wasn't a teacher for the Deaf, she wasn't able to

access the curriculum.

In addition, her FM assistive hearing device

wasn't working.

Michelle: Whatever the teacher said, it goes through

that device into Helen, directly into her hearing aid.

The FM system kept just not working.

Shot of Helen’s finished homework hanging from the wall.

Aquila: She's a smart kid.

By her being in that environment kind of

stressed her out.

Stefanie.

Stefanie: In addition to the school

classroom not being appropriate,

Helen also experienced a bullying episode

on the van on the way to school that was

really disturbing and directly connected to her disability

where a child yelled into her hearing aid

and really caused pain in her ears.

Helen: My old friends, some of them was mean.

Being rude, and saying mean words to me,

and take things from me.

Stefanie: It was definitely another reason for her to

get out of that setting and into a more

appropriate school setting.

Michelle.

Michelle: Well the first thing DLC did, they,

they listened.

That was hard for us to get people to do.

Shot of Stephanie, Helen, and Michelle, sitting on a couch and looking at a photo album.

They listened, and then they did something about it.

Stefanie: We took the case and I quickly set up

a negotiation meeting with the

Holyoke Public School System,

and I negotiated a settlement where Helen was

placed in the Willie Ross School for the Deaf where she

would be able to obtain total communication.

Helen: Now I'm going new school

and I like that.

Aquila: She's much happier.

Michelle: She came home the first day

from school, she said,

"Mom, I was able to finish my assignment!"

And she pops it out of her book bag,

"Look, Mom, and I got 100!"

(laughs)

Shot of Helen and Michelle reading a book together.

Aquila: I encourage the parents to really invest

in your child that has a disability.

Your child has a right to learn,

your child has a right to be educated.

Stefanie: Many, many families don't know

their legal rights and that's the importance of

the Disability Law Center is we get out into

the community and educate both families

and school districts on the importance of providing

a free appropriate public education in

the least restrictive environment

for children with disabilities.

Michelle: You know what I explain?

I look at it as, you know how the plane's on the runway?

And if there's potholes in it, the plane can't soar.

And what DLC did was fill in those potholes,

and Helen is that plane and I just see her

just running up and flying.

That's what DLC did for my daughter.

Shot of Helen smiling as she plays in her room.

Chris Griffin.

Chris: This is the reason we're all here tonight,

to support the work of the Law Center and to ensure

that people with disabilities throughout

the state of Massachusetts are treated fairly

and equally in all aspects of their lives.

We need your help to be able to do that,

so please donate whatever you can tonight.

We appreciate everything that you do.

Thank you.

♫ uplifting music ♫

Title graphic. Disability Law Center, and logo.

Produced by Rooted in Rights.