Dear Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Weber, and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

My name is Rani Vivathanachai and my 4th grader "T" is nine years old and a PPS student. I have already submitted testimony in support of SB 595, 596, and 736. Yesterday (3/21/2023), T listened to the testimonies given and he felt compelled to submit something himself. However, in the process of writing, he found that it became too painful and he asked me to write his story from my perspective.

As a young child, T was full of love, light, and happiness, rarely upset or agitated. Friends often commented they'd never seen such a happy baby. By the age of two years old, T taught himself how to count to 100 and beyond, had an active vocabulary of about 500 words, and was very much into stories. He immersed himself for months at a time into literature such as The Oz series, Dr Doolittle, The Hobbit, and, at three years old- Lord of the Rings. Well, he gave up on it at the end of The Two Towers, but he gave it a good go.

When it came time for T to enter kindergarten, I noted that he'd already met all of the end of school year goals, many of them even years before. I worried about what he would be doing in school all day. What I didn't understand at that time was that not only was T highly gifted, but he also had other exceptionalities (such as social anxiety and ADHD inattentive). These exceptionalities are triggered in the classroom setting and masked his aptitude and abilities. I did not understand the impact of this at that time.

Only two months into his kindergarten year, I noticed that T was being targeted with bullying behaviors. His anxiety about this kept him up for hours every night. It was a struggle to wake him up in the morning and he began refusing to go to school. This painful routine continued for months and negatively impacted all aspects of our family life. His self worth and self-esteem plummeted.

One day, T shared with me something he felt quite shameful about- he said that he was the dumbest kid in the class. I asked him why he thought this. Aside from his classmates telling him he was "dumb," he said he could only count to 70 when all the others could count to 100. I can't imagine what had happened in the classroom for him to have come to this conclusion and for him to have been assessed so poorly, but it made a lasting impact that was difficult to overcome.

First grade was better but schools closed for the pandemic. T found virtual and synchronous class time triggering, so we studied on our own. He thrived. I'd requested TAG assessments and he was identified. Unfortunately, his second grade teacher refused to accommodate his rate or level. Again, we withdrew from virtual class time and again he thrived.

T was lucky to be able to transfer to Access Academy, a public gifted alternative program. For the first couple months, I noticed his active vocabulary blossom. Little by little over these past two school years, he has started relaxing in to his own self, trusting his strengths, and developing confidence in what he knows and is able to learn. But it's taken so much time to detox from the previous schooling situation.

Many students are not able to change schools like T was able to. TAG students should be accommodated at their neighborhood schools whenever possible. Teachers, counselors, and school staff need the professional development to recognize and work with gifted children. These students need support, just like all others. I believe there are many other students like mine whose achievement is thwarted by challenges and who need scaffolding to work at their optimum levels. Many TAG students have academic and social-emotional needs that are not only NOT getting met, they are having a negative and hurtful impact on the child's identity of self and as a learner.

Every child deserves to be seen. Every child deserves to learn something new every day. Please vote yes to SB 595, 596, and 736.

Thank you for your time.