



Communication**FIRST**

Because communication is a human right.

OSERS: Don't Weaken Oversight of Equity in Special Education



A headshot of Jordyn Zimmerman smiling.

On January 28, 2026, CommunicationFIRST Board Chair [Jordyn Zimmerman](#) shared out at a formal [listening session](#) with staff from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS). The listening session asked people how to empower parents, teachers, and other stakeholders as the current administration considers major changes in education oversight. Instead, **disability advocates from a variety of backgrounds unanimously requested that OSERS and the Department of Education continue to do their jobs, without weakening federal oversight.** Advocates in attendance were those who have personal experience with special education and vocational rehabilitation services, including people with disabilities, parents, teachers, and representatives from advocacy organizations.

Read on to learn how OSERS has long supported students like Jordyn Zimmerman, and for information on ways to **advocate that OSERS remains in the Department of Education.**

OSERS has been “[committed to improving results and outcomes for people with disabilities of all ages](#)” in schools and vocational programs since 1979. Recently, a large number of [OSERS staff have been laid off](#), weakening the office’s capacity. Education

1629 K Street, NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20006

<https://CommunicationFIRST.org/>



Secretary Linda McMahon continues to work toward the administration's proposed changes that would split the services OSERS offers across other federal agencies.

Disability advocates who rely on OSERS services and our allies are deeply concerned about these changes. OSERS is vital to **maintain equity** in special education and vocational rehabilitation, and the expertise of Department of Education staff is necessary to continue to **protect the rights of disabled people**. Other agencies' staff members do not have the relevant expertise.

At the January OSERS listening session, CommunicationFIRST joined many individuals and our partner organizations in a show of solidarity. We share Jordyn Zimmerman's remarks in full to illustrate how proposed changes will affect people with speech-related disabilities.

Jordyn Zimmerman: My name is Jordyn Zimmerman. I am nonspeaking, autistic, and I communicate by typing on iPad. I was denied access to this effective means of communication until I was 18 years old. For many years, my lack of speech was incorrectly interpreted as a lack of intelligence or ability to learn. As a result, I was subjected to restraint and seclusion, and I was never asked about my goals or my future. It took years of advocating and federal guidance from a lot of people, but once I gained access to the services and supports I needed, [I thrived](#).

My experience was not because laws and protections do not exist, but because states are allowed to exploit loopholes and families.

Without strong federal oversight by people who understand teaching and learning, the protections we have will continue to go away, and the negative pieces of my experience will only increase for others. This is why OSERS and all offices, functions, and personnel, must remain in the Department of Education.

Thank you.

If you share our concerns, please utilize the recent call to action from our colleagues at Disability Belongs: [Take Action to Protect Special Education and Disability Rights](#). We have seen firsthand that students with disabilities benefit from the existence of a special education oversight agency, like OSERS, within the Department of Education. To hear tips for sharing your own story from Jordyn and more policy experts, check out our webinar, [Policy Advocacy 101 for AAC Users and Allies](#).

* * *