



**DISABILITY
LAW
CENTER**
Utah's Protection and Advocacy Agency

PRESS RELEASE

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DISABILITY LAW CENTER HELPS TEEN SPEAK UP

Yesenia Fernandez is a thirteen-year-old who lives with her family in Salt Lake City, Utah. When Yesenia was twelve, she sustained a brain injury as a result of a weak blood vessel that ruptured in her brain. She is now unable to communicate verbally and has lost strength on her right side.

Before her injury, Yesenia spoke both Spanish and English. After her injury, she was left unable to communicate with her parents and family in Spanish as well as her English-speaking friends. Her parents turned to Utah's Medicaid program for assistance. They applied to get her an augmentative communication device that could speak for her. After waiting nearly six months, their request was denied because of a mix-up in the system.

After the denial, Yesenia's family contacted the Disability Law Center (DLC) for help. The DLC's Assistive Technology team took Yesenia's case in April and filed a request for a hearing with the Utah Medicaid program to challenge the denial. When equipment like a communication device is requested, evaluated, and recommended by medical professionals, the Utah Medicaid program is required to pay for its purchase. DLC Advocate Matt Knotts, was able to straighten out the initial mix-up and negotiate with the agency to provide Yesenia with the appropriate device.

She is now learning to use her new communication device, which allows her to communicate in both Spanish and English. She is able to once again independently communicate with her family and friends. "Things have improved a lot at home. Communication is already better between Yesenia and her friends, everybody is much happier," according to Maria Fernandez, Yesenia's mother.

Matt Knotts said, "Communication is the essence of human life. All people have the right to communicate to the fullest extent possible. No individuals should be denied the right of self-expression. Communication devices, like the one funded by Medicaid for Yesenia, make communication, and ultimately independence, possible."

The DLC assists many Utahns with disabilities like Yesenia obtain the assistive technology devices and services they need in order to work, study, play, and be fully integrated citizens. The DLC offers free assistance to people with disabilities who apply for assistive technology through Medicaid, Medicare and private insurance programs and are denied. If you have a question about assistive technology or the legal rights of people with disabilities, please contact our Short Term Assistance Team at 1-800-662-9080 (voice) or 1-800-550-4182 (TTY).

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