

December 19, 2018

Dear Friend,

Becoming a parent is an important decision. Alischa is a young woman who made this choice and gave birth to a beautiful son, Steven, on May 24, 2015 at St. Peter's Hospital in Helena. Steven was born with medical complications and was transferred to Community Hospital in Missoula. For the first month of his life Alischa was by his side without fail. During that month, Alischa learned infant CPR and took basic infant care and feeding classes. She also expressed and stored her breast milk.

On June 25, 2015, Alischa took her new baby boy home. Ten days later, Steven was taken from her and placed in foster care. Montana Child Protective Services removed Steven from his mother because Alischa is deaf and experiences a mental illness. CPS mistakenly determined her communication difficulties to be an intellectual disability and concluded Alischa "does not have the intellectual capacity, insight, and patience to safely and sufficiently meet the baby's needs." The State was wrong.



In the 18 months following CPS's discriminatory removal of Steven from his mom, Disability Rights Montana spent \$46,723 in experts and legal fees in representing Alischa.

In a very emotional reunion on November 8, 2016, Steven was returned to his mother. "I am so grateful to the DRM staff. They never gave up on me. Because of them I have my son," Alischa tearfully exclaimed.

It is hard to comprehend that because Alischa is deaf and uses sign language to communicate, the state would remove her baby and conclude she could not parent her child. Cases like this are exactly why Disability Rights Montana's work is so important. It is our job to protect and advocate for human, civil, and legal rights of the nearly 147,000 of our neighbors, friends and family members with disabilities.

Disability Rights Montana is asking for your financial assistance. DRM will use 100% of your charitable tax-deductible donation to continue to advocate for Montanans like Alischa.

Please use the enclosed card and envelope or visit our website at www.DisabilityRightsMT.org to make your gift.

Sincerely,

Bernadette Franks-Ongoy
Executive Director



Steven now age 3 with Mom. He is thriving.
He communicates using his voice and sign language.

If you would like to read Alischa's full story, visit DRM's website at www.DisabilityRightsMT.org.