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Education Health and Environmental Affairs Committee  
SB 853- Voluntary Ethical Special Education Advocate Certificate Program  
February 18, 2020

**Position: Oppose**

The Arc Maryland is the largest statewide advocacy organization dedicated to the rights and quality of life of persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We oppose SB 853, which would create a “voluntary ethical special education advocate certificate program.” Our opposition is based on several reasons.

First, the purpose of the bill is unclear. “Advocate” is not defined, and it is not clear who the bill is intended to effect or to serve.

Second, the bill would allow “advocates” who complete a webinar or a training module to obtain a certificate of completion, presumably to indicate credential or capacity to serve as an Ethical Special Education Advocate, but neither the content of the training, nor the length of the webinar or training module are specified. There is no reason, therefore, to assume that a person who completes the webinar or training module would, by virtue of having received a certificate of completion, have any more authority, knowledge, skill, or qualifying training than the next person.

Third, because the program is voluntary, there is no guarantee that “advocates” who may be in need of the training envisioned by this bill would avail themselves of it. SB 853 is vague and would have no practical meaning if enacted. In fact, the bill might have the unintended consequence of leading people to believe that an advocate, who possesses a certificate of completion of the program, is more qualified than he or she actually is.

For these reasons, The Arc Maryland opposes SB 853

Respectfully submitted,

Ande Kolp Executive Director