

Gloria Jeanne Petit-Clair
434 Peach Court
Annapolis, MD 21409

February 13, 2020

Maryland General Assembly
Maryland Senate
Education, Health and Environmental Affairs
Annapolis, MD 21409

Senator Patterson;

Thank you for sponsoring SB 853 entitled: Voluntary Ethical Special Education Advocate Certification Program, which is scheduled to be heard in committee on 02/18/2020 at 1:00. I hope that you will accept my written testimony.

I am a long-time member of the Maryland Speech-Language and Hearing Association, having served as both President and Director of Public Policy and as a representative to the MSDE State Steering Committee for SLPs.

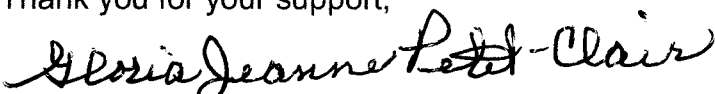
The Special Education (IEP) Process is a partnership of educators and families. Often, families seek support from advocates to navigate that process. I have worked with many advocates over the years who demonstrate a variety of skill levels. Most advocates facilitate the process in positive ways and provide a good service to families. However, I have worked with advocates who lack the knowledge and skill to facilitate decision-making. Currently, anyone can call themselves an educational advocate or consultant without training or experience and can bill families for their services.

SB 853 would address the issue of consumer protection by certifying Educational Advocates. An Educational Advocacy program would include application, instruction and certification processes. Certification would indicate that the candidate demonstrates a level of understanding of the Special Education Process. This is an important step. I support the creation of a voluntary certificate program that would offer families another layer of consumer protection.

Language is written into the bill protecting current IDEA statutes stating that families can continue to engage with non-certificated individuals who advocate for them, and that school districts can not violate any provisions contained within IDEA.

I ask that the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee consider SB 0853 and offer a positive review.

Thank you for your support,


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