



## THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES

### ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

#### **Testimony in support of HB699 – Office of the Attorney General - Special Education Ombudsman**

Every day across our State, families of children with disabilities face a wide range of difficulties. Proper education is an especially unique challenge that faces these students on a daily basis. To ensure that these children are getting the specialized care that they need in school, they are issued an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

An IEP is a plan to provide services in public schools to children with disabilities under the Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. It is a guide to services for teachers, parents, and the student to ensure that the child receives a proper public education as guaranteed by federal law.

Often, school administration will disagree on the implementation of a child's IEP. This creates a situation in which parents need outside help to advocate for their children. This bill creates the position of Ombudsman in the Office of the Attorney General, to help facilitate this process for families.

As you all are aware, many low-income families simply cannot afford to hire outside help, and are often unable to find assistance elsewhere. HB699 aims to help with this issue, by creating a position that will be able to explain the process clearly and provide a variety of different options to resolve the issue. This service would be free of cost to families, and provide assistance to those in need.

To be clear, the purpose of the Ombudsman is not to advocate on behalf of students & families, but would act as a resource, providing information.

The position of Ombudsman would be implemented to do the following:

- Serve as a source of knowledge and information on laws regarding students with disabilities,
- Provide impartial information to the parents of students with disabilities on how to navigate the process of obtaining special education evaluations and services,
- Provide impartial information on the procedures for resolving disagreements and disputes regarding the provision of special education or disciplinary action taken against students with disabilities,
- Explain to parents of children with disabilities the rights of parents and students,
- Work with all parties to ensure that the special education system functions as intended,
- Identify any patterns of complaints made by parents of students with disabilities and inform MSDE if this occurs, and
- Serve as a general resource for disability-related information.

In addition, I am proposing an amendment to this bill that would require the Attorney General's Office to provide notice of this new position when IEPs are issued.

I respectfully request a favorable report on House Bill 699.