



THE COORDINATING CENTER _R
INSPIRED SOLUTIONS

Committee: House Ways and Means Committee

Bill Number: House Bill 699

Title: Office of the Attorney General – Special Education Ombudsman

Hearing Date: February 21, 2020

Position: Support

The Coordinating Center (The Center) supports *House Bill 699 – Office of the Attorney General – Special Education Ombudsman*. This bill would establish the Special Education Ombudsman in the Office of the Attorney General to serve as a resource to provide information regarding special education rights and services.

The Center is an independent, care coordination organization with over 35 years of experience, coordinating services for more than 10,000 people with disabilities and complex medical needs across the state. This includes serving as the care coordination provider in four jurisdictions under the Maryland Medicaid Autism Waiver, which is administered by the Maryland State Department of Education-Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services and the 24 local school systems.

We are increasingly concerned of a lack of provider capacity under the Autism Waiver as we hear regularly from families of their frustration over the lack of direct care staff to provide respite and Intensive Individual Support Services. Families oftentimes experience this after waiting years on the State's Autism Waiver Registry waiting for a slot for their child.

Without expanded provider capacity in each local jurisdiction to provide services identified in a child's service plan, their needs are not being met. For example, children who need behavioral support and assistance with independent life skills continue to be challenged without such services available. Parents who rely on respite care are unable to get the breaks they need from the stress of raising a child with Autism.

The Center strongly supports this bill as it would establish a mechanism by which we could refer families to submit their complaints in order to collect statewide data on the extent of this issue. While we know there is a provider capacity issue, there is no statewide data to show the extent of the problem. Without this information, it has been very difficult to strategize possible solutions with our local and state partners.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony, and we urge a favorable vote. If we can provide any further information, please contact Rachael Faulkner at rfaulkner@policypartners.net or (410) 693-4000.