

Dr.Mezzomo;SB266 Voluntary Special Education Advo

Uploaded by: Mezzomo, Angela

Position: FAV

Dr. H.A.Mezzomo; Senate Bill 266: Education - Voluntary Ethical Special Education Advocate Certificate Program; SUPPORT

Helen Angela Mezzomo, PhD, CCC-SLP
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Committee Chair Pinsky
2 West
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

I hope you are well.

I am a speech-language pathologist with over 30 years of experience. During this time, I have had the pleasure of working with multiple students with special needs. These students receive educational supports based on their Individualized Education Program (IEP). In most instances, the members of the IEP team, which includes the parents, work well. They are able to come to agreements about what is best for the student. In other instances, the team members, generally the family, do not agree. This is when families opt to find a Special Education Advocate. However, there is no directory of advocates; there are no educational criteria to refer to oneself as an advocate; there is no recourse for the family when the advocate acts in bad faith.

This pro-family bill would help alleviate some of the challenges families face when seeking out someone skilled and knowledgeable in Special Education Law. Families have reported how difficult it has been to find an advocate, or how expensive it is to hire an advocate. This bill would aid in the creation of a directory. People who have completed coursework or certificate programs could be listed in a central location. The program is voluntary, so it would not diminish the role of grassroots advocacy programs. Additionally, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) would still prevail, allowing families to bring anyone they would like to an IEP meeting. Overall, SB 266 would provide a degree of consumer protection for families seeking special education advocates.

Thank you for your consideration on behalf of individuals with educational or developmental disabilities and their families. I hope that you will give SB 266 a favorable report.

Sincerely,

Dr. Helen Angela Mezzomo, CCC-SLP

Advocate Bill DB SB 266.pdf

Uploaded by: Trotter, Dawn

Position: FAV

SB 266 Voluntary Ethical Special Education Certificate

Diana F. Bennett
833 Glen Allen Drive
Baltimore, MD 21229

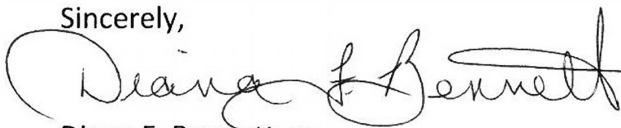
Dear Senators:

I write you today to voice my support for Senate Bill 266. This is an issue about which I feel strongly as it impacts the protection of the consumer, in this instance, the parents and families of children who have IEPs. This bill seeks to protect those parents who opt to use the services of a special education advocate. Having worked as a pediatric speech-language pathologist in the inner city of Baltimore, I appreciate the important work that advocates do on behalf of their clients. However, not all advocates are created equal, and not all are truly qualified to serve in the child's best interests. This pro-parent bill simply seeks to provide an additional tool to parents who are looking for assistance with navigating the complicated IEP process.

The Bill seeks to create a voluntary certification program for special education advocates. Advocates are not required or mandated to get this additional certification, but it provides an avenue if they seek to hone their skills. The Maryland State Department of Education would create or procure and administer this program so as to insure its fidelity. This bill does not prohibit parents from engaging non-certificated advocates. It does not prevent parents from having anyone of their choosing at the meeting. Most importantly, it does not permit school districts to violate any provisions of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

In conclusion, I would like to thank you for taking the time to consider my thoughts as you make this decision. Please contact me at the above address if you have any questions or need additional information. I can be contacted by phone at 301-848-8030. An email can be sent to dianarfb@hotmail.com

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Diana F. Bennett". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Diana F. Bennett

Dawn Trotter, MS Ed_CCC-SLP Support for SB 266.pdf

Uploaded by: Trotter, Dawn

Position: FAV

Dawn Trotter, MS Ed/CCC-SLP
Speech-Language Pathologist
833 Glen Allen Dr. Baltimore, MD 21229
dwnltrtr@hotmail.com 301-848-8020
1/24/2021

Dear Senators,

My name is Dawn Trotter and I am a veteran Speech-Language Pathologist with 21 years' experience in public education. I am writing to voice my support for SB 266 Voluntary Ethical Special Education Advocate Certificate Program. During my career partnering with families, I have witnessed how challenging and frightening it can be for parents to navigate the special education process. Often parents and guardians are overwhelmed by meetings, testing/results, education plans, and professional opinions, all while dealing with their own emotions surrounding an educational disability diagnosis.

Despite local educational agencies and providers' best efforts, parents can feel confused, lost, and alone. This is when a well-trained, ethical, special education advocate can be a lifeline for families. These professionals help parents and guardians maneuver a complicated system to ensure their children receive appropriate educational services. I have had the pleasure of collaborating with many skilled special education advocates to best meet the needs of my students. Unfortunately, there are also bad actors working as special education advocates and educational consultants that take advantage of families in a vulnerable state. I have personally interacted with individuals that have clearly not understood IDEA or COMAR regulations, demanded changes that were not appropriate, deliverable, or ethical, all while keeping families on the hook for thousands of dollars. Others have engaged as advocates and then funneled the parents to other arms of their business for additional private therapies and educational services.

SB 266 would provide a degree of consumer protection for families seeking special education advocates by creating a list of skilled professionals that have sought out this voluntary MSDE certification with an emphasis on ethical practices. Often families rely on word-of-mouth recommendations from others when seeking an educational advocate. While this can be helpful, there is often no way a parent can vet professionals marketing their services. At this time, there are no minimum requirements for an individual to be considered a special education advocate.

There is no code of ethics guiding the actions of special education advocates.

There is no continuing education requirement for advocates. Anyone can print business cards and get to work charging families thousands of dollars. Passage of this bill could result in creating a list in which parents and caregivers seek out more qualified advocates while providing protection for the families and caregivers who are raising some of our most vulnerable citizens. The voluntary registry would also be a mechanism for families and caregivers to locate individuals

who have committed to working on behalf of students in an ethical manner. Thank you for your consideration on behalf of individuals with educational or developmental disabilities and their families. I hope that you will give SB 266 a favorable report.

Sincerely,

Dawn Trotter, MS Ed/CCC-SLP

AACPS SB266 Voluntary Ethical Special Ed Advocate

Uploaded by: Ortiz, Jeanette

Position: FWA



SB266 EDUCATION - VOLUNTARY ETHICAL SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVOCATE CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

January 27, 2021

EDUCATION, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

Jeanette Ortiz, Esq., Legislative & Policy Counsel (410.703.5352)

Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) supports with amendments **SB266 Education - Voluntary Ethical Special Education Advocate Certificate Program**. This bill requires the State Department of Education (MSDE) to establish the Voluntary Ethical Special Education Advocate Certificate Program on or before July 1, 2022, for administration of a voluntary certificate program for ethical special education advocates. It specifies qualifications and application procedures for a certificate. It also requires MSDE to issue a certificate to a certain applicant and authorized an applicant to petition for judicial review of a decision of MSDE that relates to issuing or renewing a certificate.

AACPS believes that collaboration with families is essential to the success of all students. In fact, AACPS has the Partners for Success program to assist families of AACPS students receiving special education services. Partners for Success provides families with guidance, workshops, professional development, and supports. The program has been very successful in helping families.

Maryland does not currently have any quality control, certification, or training requirements for individuals who refer to themselves as advocates for parents of students with special needs. By establishing a Voluntary Ethical Special Education Advocate Certificate Program, this bill could ensure that special education advocates have the necessary training and certification to properly support parents. AACPS proposes that the bill be amended to include the following:

- a face-to-face component to the training, which would allow for greater opportunity for learning;
- clarification on how “good moral character” can be determined; and
- a mechanism for others to express concern to MSDE when a certificated advocate is not acting professionally or in the best interest of students and families.

Accordingly, AACPS respectfully requests a **FAVORABLE** committee report with the proposed amendments on SB266.

Testimony In Opposition of SB 266 HB 273 Senate MS

Uploaded by: Ceruolo, Rich

Position: UNF

January 25, 2021

Maryland Senate
Miller Senate Office Bldg.
11 Bladen St.
Annapolis, MD. 21401

In OPPOSITION of SB 266 / HB 273: Education – Voluntary Ethical SPED Advocate Certificate Program.

Members of the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee.

I am the parent of a child with multiple challenges and disabilities. He has been bounced between 504 plans and IEP plans over the course of his time in the local school system. IEP meetings, doctors' bills, therapy appointments, tutoring services the bills stack up quickly. As part of my education on how to navigate the special education system within Maryland I sought out free and reduced fee training from various family support organizations, as well as other SPED Advocate programs.

Many families of children with disabilities cannot afford to devote the time to advocate for their child. Many can't afford to pay an attorney to fight for their child's rights. Many of them cannot afford to pay for an advocate. But many of us within the advocacy community donate our time to these families. Unfortunately, there is just SO much need out there. It is overwhelming and heart wrenching to hear the stories of children being underserved, their civil rights violated and families being retaliated against by their local education agency. This does happen here in Maryland, every-single-day. That is what needs to change; equity in the education system needs to improve, special education services and funding need to improve, and access to quality parent training also needs to improve.

There is one (1), MSDE sanctioned PTI center serving all of AA County, and surrounding counties while none exist in many other parts of the state. This bill asks MSDE to start, track and manage an advocate training certificate program. Advocates that may be opposed to MSDE, and local systems employees at IEP meetings. That's a bit like the fox training the rooster on how to watch the hen house. NO. How can we rely on an overburdened state agency, that can't even be consistent with how to teach essential skills like reading?

Why not re-purpose any proposed funding toward improving services and access to the existing parent training centers? Why not open and staff more parent / advocate training centers within Maryland? We suggest using this money to partner with organizations like COPAA, The ARC, MD Bar Association and MD Coalition of Families to create advocacy training programs that are both fair and equitable for all Marylanders. And offer equal access to training programs across all stakeholders; families, school personnel and advocates alike.

We simply need to do better for our most vulnerable students and their families. Please ease our burdens and oppose SB 266, and the way it is written. Instead, we need to improve access to advocacy programs and parent training centers. Not task an already overburdened state agency with more tasks. We need to improve the delivery of special education services and improve education policies across the state of Maryland, and further enable access to community-based advocacy and parent training.

Thank you for your time, and consideration of my testimony today.

Richard Ceruolo, Parent and advocate for children with disabilities | Parent Advocacy Consortium

SB 266 DD Council Oppose.pdf

Uploaded by: London, Rachel

Position: UNF



**Maryland Developmental
Disabilities Council**

EMPOWERMENT • OPPORTUNITY • INCLUSION

Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

SB 266: Education – Voluntary Ethical Special Education Advocate Certificate Program

January 27, 2021

Position: **Oppose**

The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council (DD Council), a statewide public policy organization led by people with developmental disabilities and their families, opposes SB 266, which would create a voluntary ethical special education advocate certificate program. **While the DD Council supports efforts to empower families with more information and resources, SB 266 does not do that.**

The DD Council, along with other stakeholders, met with the proponents of this bill and expressed our concerns. While some concerns were addressed, specifically by including the language on page 4, lines 14-16 that says “this section may not be construed to prohibit or prevent a parent or guardian from choosing a noncertified advocate,” the remaining concerns outlined below cannot be addressed.

It is our understanding that the intent of SB 266, as in previous years, is to promote the “good actors” – those advocates that “complete an online training module or webinar” and “pass an online examination”...; provide consumer protections by giving families with more information about qualified advocates; and equip parents with the tools they need to advocate for their children. However, SB 266 does none of these things.

- **Completing an online training module does not make someone a better, more qualified advocate.** Nor does having a certificate. There is no reason to assume that a person who completes this online training module would have reached any particular level of achievement or level of skill or knowledge. **This sort of recognition, even when voluntary, can lead to false hope for families.**
- In fact, there is no guarantee that the advocates who may be in need of the training envisioned by SB 266 would avail themselves of it.
- Instead of addressing consumer protection, SB 853 may result in the unintended consequence of dissuading a family from bringing an advocate at all. **Efforts to ensure quality should be centered on consumer education and ensuring families know about the different resources available to them to help them meaningfully participate in their child’s education.**
- **This bill is not supported by families – the group it is intended to help and protect. In fact, multiple organizations representing families across Maryland are also opposed.** (*See Opposition testimony of the Education Advocacy Coalition*).

For these reasons, the DD Council opposes SB 266.

Contact: Rachel London, Executive Director: RLondon@md-council.org

EACtestimony.SB266.pdf

Uploaded by: Margolis, Leslie

Position: UNF

Education Advocacy Coalition

for Students with Disabilities

SENATE EDUCATION, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL 266: EDUCATION—VOLUNTARY ETHICAL SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVOCATE CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

JANUARY 27, 2021

POSITION: OPPOSE

The Education Advocacy Coalition for Students with Disabilities (EAC), a coalition of more than 30 organizations and individuals concerned with education policy for students with disabilities in Maryland, opposes Senate Bill 266, which would create a “voluntary ethical special education advocate certificate program.” The EAC opposes Senate Bill 266 for 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 encompass. Second, the bill would allow “advocates” who complete a webinar or training module to obtain a certificate of completion, but the content and length of the webinar or module are not specified. There is no reason to assume that a person who completes the webinar or training module would, by virtue of having received a certificate of completion, have reached any particular level of achievement or would automatically be an “ethical special education advocate.” Third, because the program is voluntary, there is no guarantee that “advocates” who may be in need of the training envisioned by Senate Bill 266 would avail themselves of it. Senate Bill 266 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 EAC opposes Senate Bill 266.

For more information, please contact Leslie Seid Margolis, Chairperson, at 410-727-6352, ext. 2505 or at lesliem@disabilityrightsmd.org.

Respectfully submitted,

Selene Almazan, Selene Almazan Law, LLC
Rene Averitt-Sanzone, The Parents' Place of Maryland
Linda Barton, Ms.Ed., Education Consultant
Elizabeth Benevides, Howard County Autism Society
Ellen A. Callegary, Law Offices of Ellen A. Callegary, P.A.
Michelle Davis, ABCs for Life Success
SarahRuth Davis, Parent Advocacy Consortium
Jennifer Engel Fisher, Weinfeld Education Group
Lisa Frank, Andrea Bennett and Jen Ritchotte, Special Kids Company
Ann Geddes, Maryland Coalition of Families
Kalman Hettleman, Independent Advocate
Morgan Durand Horvath, Abilities Network
Nicole Joseph, Law Offices of Nicole Joseph

Rosemary Kitzinger & Marjorie Guldán, Bright Futures, LLC
Rachel London, Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council
Leslie Seid Margolis, Disability Rights Maryland
Mark B. Martin, Law Offices of Mark B. Martin, P.A.
Ellen O'Neill, Atlantic Seaboard Dyslexia Education Center
Melissa Riccobono, National Federation of the Blind of Maryland/Maryland Parents of Blind Children
Rebecca Rienzi, Pathfinders for Autism
Lori Scott, The Arc Maryland
Jaime Seaton, McDonough Law LLC
Monica Simpkins, Learning Disabilities Association of Maryland
Karleen Spitulnik, Decoding Dyslexia Maryland
Ronnetta Stanley, Loud Voices Together
Wayne Steedman, Steedman Law Group, LLC
Maureen van Stone, Mallory Finn Legg and Alyssa Thorn, Project HEAL at Kennedy Krieger Institute
Jessica Williams, Education Due Process Solutions, LLC