

Education Advocacy Coalition for Students with Disabilities

SENATE EDUCATION, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL 504: OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL—SPECIAL EDUCATION OMBUDSMAN

FEBRUARY 18, 2020

LETTER OF INFORMATION

The Education Advocacy Coalition for Students with Disabilities (EAC), a coalition of more than 25 organizations and individuals concerned with education policy for students with disabilities in Maryland, submits this letter of information as the Committee considers Senate Bill 504, which would create a special education ombudsman to be housed within the Office of the Attorney General. According to Senate Bill 504, the Ombudsman would serve as a source of information about special education law and the special education process, would work to ensure that the special education system works as intended, identify patterns of complaints made by parents of students with disabilities and inform the Maryland State Department of Education of any such pattern, and serve as a general information and referral resource for disability-related issues.

Should Senate Bill 504 be enacted, it will be important for the Ombudsman to coordinate with existing providers who do some of the work intended for the Ombudsman. Currently, the Governor's Office of Educational Accountability receives and attempts to resolve complaints from parents of students with disabilities and others with concerns about special education in Maryland. The Parents' Place of Maryland, the state's parent information and training center federally funded by the United States Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs, provides support, information and training about the special education process to families of students with disabilities; additionally, the state-funded Partners for Success programs located within Maryland's school systems also are available to parents to provide information and training about special education. However, Maryland lacks a designated central person to track trends in complaints or to make referrals to available state and federal services and programs.

We appreciate the Committee taking this information into account when considering Senate Bill 504. For more information, please contact Leslie Seid Margolis, Chairperson, at 410-727-6352, ext. 2505 or at lesliem@disabilityrightsmd.org.

Respectfully submitted,

Selene A. Almazan, Selene Almazan Law, LLC

Rene Averitt-Sanzone, Parents' Place of Maryland

Linda Barton, Education Advocate

Elizabeth Benevides, Howard County Autism Society

Ellen A. Callegary, Law Offices of Ellen Callegary, P.A.

Michelle Davis, ABCs for Life Success

Jennifer Engel Fisher, Weinfeld Education Group

Ann Geddes, Maryland Coalition of Families

Morgan Durand Horvath, Abilities Network

Nicole Joseph, Nicole Joseph Law

Rosemary Kitzinger and Marjorie Guldan, Bright Futures, LLC

Rachel London, Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council

Leslie Seid Margolis, Disability Rights Maryland

Ellen O'Neill, Atlantic Seaboard Dyslexia Education Center

Rebecca Rienzi, Pathfinders for Autism

Sarah Ruth, Parent Advocacy Consortium

Ronnetta Stanley, Loud Voices Together

Wayne Steedman, Steedman Law Group

Maureen van Stone, Project HEAL at Kennedy Krieger Institute