



Re: House Bill 1595: Education - Voluntary Ethical Special Education Advocate Certificate Program

I am writing on behalf of the Maryland Speech Language Hearing Association to request your favorable report for HB 1595: Education - Voluntary Ethical Special Education Advocate Certificate Program

The Maryland Speech-Language-Hearing Association (MSHA) is a professional association comprised of over speech/language pathologists and audiologists working in various settings across Maryland. MSHA advocates for people of all ages who have speech, language, swallowing and/or hearing disabilities. Approximately 64% of our members work in public schools, providing services to children ages three to 21 years old.

HB 1595 would provide a degree of consumer protection for families seeking special education advocates. There are times in which a family feels they need additional supports or that they are not being heard by the school system. This is generally when special education advocates become involved. However, 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.

Passage of this bill could result in creating a list in which parents and caregivers can go to find an advocate; provide protection for the families and caregivers who are protecting some of our most vulnerable citizens. The voluntary registry would be a mechanism for families and caregivers to locate individuals who have committed to working on behalf of students in an ethical manner. Under the provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, parents are entitled to bring anyone they would like to an IEP meeting; this would not change under this bill.

Thank you for your consideration on behalf of individuals with communication, hearing and swallowing disorders and the therapist who serve them. I hope that you will give HB 1595 a favorable report.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Bell
President, Maryland Speech-Language Hearing Association