

Dr. H. Angela Mezzomo  
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I am writing to you regarding HB 1595/SB 853-Voluntary Ethical Special Education Advocate Certificate Program. As a speech-language pathologist with over 30 years of experience I have worked with a number of families and schools. I have had the pleasure of working with teams who consistently strived to achieve the best for a student. I have also worked with families who felt that their team was not effective and sought out advocates. These are the families I worry about the most: they are struggling, searching and vulnerable.

At this time, there are no educational or measurable requirements to become a special education advocate. There is no code of ethics for special education advocates. Without these two safeguards, families are risking a considerable amount when hiring an advocate. They rely on word of mouth or a computer generated search, but have no true way of knowing if the person or team they hire understand education law, special education law, the Maryland Code of Regulations (COMAR), various medical or educational diagnosis or the therapies, specialized instruction or educational strategies that support students.

HB 1595/SB 853 would provide a degree of consumer protection for families seeking special education advocates.

During my career, I have served, and continue to serve as an advocate for adults with special needs in the State of New York (NYS Surrogate Decision Making Committee). We were required to take training courses, be credentialed, maintain our credentials and ensure that there is no conflict of interest with the cases on which we serve. I find it concerning that some of the most vulnerable people in the state of Maryland are not offered the same protections.

Thank you for your consideration on behalf of students with special needs, their families and all of the people who support them. I hope that you will give HB 1595 / SB 853 a favorable report.

Sincerely,

**H. Angela Mezzomo**

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