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HB 1595/SB 853-Voluntary Ethical Special Education Advocate Certificate
Program-SUPPORT-Racael Caruso

My name is Rachael Caruso. I am a speech language pathologist with 10 years of experience. I have worked in a variety of settings including elementary, middle, and high schools in Anne Arundel County and Baltimore City. I currently work in the area of early intervention with children who are 3-to-5 years old and their families. I am writing in support of HB 1595 / SB 853.

I have participated in many IEP meetings over my career as a service provider. During some of these meetings, families would hire special education advocates for various reasons. At times this was due to disagreements between the family and school team. Other times the special education advocate had become a trusted source for the family to review the documents prior to the meeting and facilitate discussions with the school team members. Each special education advocate had his or her own style and specialties. However, it was very obvious which advocates were more qualified, had goals of working to find solutions, or at least were aware of the IEP process.

HB 1595 / SB 853 would provide a degree of consumer protection for families seeking special education advocates. 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 or a code of ethics for an individual to be considered a special education advocate.

Passage of this bill could result in creating a list in which parents and caregivers seek out more qualified advocates. 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.

Thank you for your consideration on behalf of individuals with educational or developmental disabilities and their families. I hope that you will give HB 1595 / SB 853 a favorable report.

Rachael Caruso MA
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