

**Support Senate Bill 853: Education - Voluntary Ethical Special Education
Advocate Certificate Program**

**C'Rai Weeden Shannon
1158 Carbondale Way
Gambrills, MD 21054
ccwshannon@gmail.com**

My name is C'Rai Weeden Shannon; I am a speech-language pathologist with fifteen years of experience. I am also the parent of a student with a disability.

I support SB 853, a pro-parent bill, which seeks to provide a level of consumer protection for families seeking the assistance of a special education advocate. As a parent of a child with special needs I can tell you that the IEP process can at times prove to be overwhelming and confusing. If not for my professional background and knowledge of the IEP process, my child likely would not have received the services necessary for her to thrive in the school environment. Parents without an educational and professional background in special education may be left at a disadvantage if there are no protections for families seeking special education advocates.

During the evaluation, eligibility and IEP process families of students with special needs may feel they need additional support or that they are not being heard by the school system. This is generally when special education advocates become involved. Often families rely on word-of-mouth recommendations from others when seeking an educational advocate. Currently, there are no federal or state legislative or regulatory guidelines addressing the educational or credentialing requirements for an individual to serve as a special education advocate. There is no code of ethics guiding the actions of special education advocates; or continuing education requirements for advocates. This means there no way a parent can vet professionals marketing their services. It is, therefore, essential that parents are as informed as possible when selecting a special education advocate.

Passage of this bill could result in creating a list/registry in which parents and caregivers can seek out more qualified advocates. If this registry existed, I know that I would use this resource to find a qualified educational advocate to ensure protection of my legal rights as a parent, as well as the legal rights of my child. A 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. Currently parents are entitled to bring anyone they would like to an IEP meeting according to IDEA and this would not change under this bill.

Thank you for your consideration on behalf of individuals with educational or developmental disabilities and their families. As a parent of a child with special needs and as a professional I support SB 853 and I hope that you will give SB 853 a favorable report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "C'Rai Weeden Shannon".

C'Rai Weeden Shannon