

February 10, 2020

RE: HB 42
Maryland House of Delegates
Health and Government Operations
6 Bladen St.
Annapolis, MD. 21401

Testimony in Support of HB 42:

Good afternoon.

I am the parent of a child with multiple challenges and disabilities. He has been bounced between 504 plans and IEP plans over the course of 8 years within the AACPS system. And I fully support HB 42 and all of the December 2019 recommendations for improvement to the Office of the Ombudsman's PIA process.

During the last 1.5 years I have tried to obtain policy related to the treatment of students with disabilities at the local school system level and from MSDE. Without this information parents, advocates and attorneys are at a distinct disadvantage in the special education process. Making it harder for parents to advocate for services, supports and accommodations that their child needs to be successful in Maryland's public schools. But we are met with a broken PIA process, which lacks robust oversight and with no process for appeals.

As if the special education process is not difficult enough for families and students, factors like a lack of a reliable and consistent data set further complicates our ability to advocate for appropriate accommodations for our children during the school academic year, and year to year.

Students with IEP's are protected by IDEA which guarantees that a student's progress be tracked by all the members of a student's IEP team. This is not true for students with Section 504 Accommodation Plans. As these plans are administered at the school system level, progress data has not been consistently or accurately tracked by the Maryland State Department of Education. For more than 1.5 years I have tried to get my son's education records and a copy of school system policy from both AACPS and MSDE. I have been met with many hurdles and stone walling efforts along the way.

This information is crucial in order to track and measure education programs for children with disabilities. The data is needed to help improve the outcomes of students with disabilities within the Maryland education system. One simply can't track, what one cannot fully quantify. Quality data, documentation and numbers allow us all to track how Maryland students are progressing in their educational settings.

Please return a favorable report on HB 42. Thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony.

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