



TO: The Honorable Guy Guzzone, Chair  
Members, Senate Budget and Taxation Committee  
The Honorable Craig J. Zucker

FROM: Pamela Metz Kasemeyer

DATE: March 19, 2021

RE: **SUPPORT** – Senate Bill 958 – *Nonpublic Special Education Schools – State Contribution – Increase*

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For more than 60 years, Linwood Center has been providing life-changing programs and services for children and adults living with autism and related developmental disabilities. Linwood currently supports child and adults on the autism spectrum from jurisdictions throughout the State of Maryland. Linwood is one of a handful of programs in the United States and one of only three in the state of Maryland that provides comprehensive education and residential programs throughout the lifespan under one service umbrella. Linwood offers program continuity from childhood into adulthood, developing lifelong relationships with individuals living with autism from elementary school through retirement and old age. Linwood's accredited nonpublic special education program and licensed residential programs provide intensive positive behavioral supports and long-term educational and vocational services to Maryland's autism community. All the students that Linwood serves in its special education program are students referred from public schools in Maryland. Linwood respectfully offers its **support** for Senate Bill 958.

Senate Bill 958 will begin to enable nonpublic special education schools to align their teachers' salaries with those of teachers in the public schools. MSDE recently completed a parity study of teacher salaries between public schools and nonpublic special education schools. The study found dramatic disparities despite the fact that nonpublic special education schools serve some of Maryland's most challenged children and youth. The enactment of the BluePrint for Maryland's Future, which includes enhanced teacher salaries, will only serve to exacerbate the current inequity and make teacher recruitment and retention for nonpublic special education programs even more challenging. Furthermore, the training and skills that Linwood and other nonpublic special education schools require of its teachers is often greater than that required in the public schools. Linwood, and other special education schools, are also 12-month programs, with no summer break. Consequently, the challenge of teacher recruitment and retention is especially problematic. Therefore, the need to address salary disparities is critically important if the State is to adequately support its special needs children who cannot be appropriately educated in a public-school setting.

Linwood appreciates that there will need to be a revision to the current tuition/salary expense rate setting process for nonpublic special education schools if the current disparity is to be fully addressed. However, passage of Senate Bill 958, which provides an increased State contribution to the cost of educating children with disabilities in nonpublic schools, will give nonpublic special education schools a short term but meaningful adjustment to the current rate structure to address the salary inequities and assist with teacher recruitment and retention. Linwood believes that MSDE will be able to permanently address the salary inequities with the input from relevant stakeholders and the data collected from the disparity study. Linwood looks forward to working with MSDE and others moving forward but believes that the two-year funding requirements of Senate Bill 958 are more than justified and are necessary for the nonpublic schools in meeting the needs of the children they serve. Linwood respectfully requests a favorable position.

**For more information call:**  
Pamela Metz Kasemeyer  
410-244-7000