

# Education Advocacy Coalition

for Students with Disabilities

**Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee**

**SB 921: County Boards of Education—Accessibility Standards—Digital Tools (Nonvisual Access Accountability Act for Grades K-12 Education**

**March 9, 2021**

**Position: Support**

The Education Advocacy Coalition for Students with Disabilities (EAC), a coalition of more than 30 organizations and individuals concerned with education policy for students with disabilities in Maryland, supports House Bill 1181, which would ensure local school system and Maryland State Department of Education accountability for accessible digital tools by requiring that a member of the vision department be part of the procurement team when requests for proposals are developed and issued. Additionally, vendors would be more accountable because they would be asked to submit a Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT) as part of their proposals. House Bill 1181 further provides that vendors who fail to meet accessibility standards will be fined.

When school buildings closed in March, 2020 and education shifted to digital learning, students who are blind or otherwise unable to access learning through visual means, were denied the opportunity to participate or to participate fully in distance learning. Although accessible information and communication technology is required by law, lack of enforcement by local school systems and the Maryland State Department of Education makes this requirement ring hollow for the students who have been unable to learn effectively during the past year because their technology is not accessible to them.

House Bill 1181 would address this problem by creating the accountability that has been missing, and would enable those who require nonvisual access to information and communication technology to more easily obtain that access. For these reasons, the EAC supports House Bill 1181.

Respectfully submitted,

Selene A. Almazan, Esq., Selene A. Almazan Law  
Rene Averitt-Sanzone, The Parents' Place of Maryland  
Linda Barton, MSED, Education Consultant  
Beth Benevides, Howard County Autism Society  
Ellen A. Callegary, Law Offices of Ellen A. Callegary, P.A.  
Michelle Davis, M.S.Ed., ABCs for Life Success  
SarahRuth Davis, Parent Advocacy Consortium  
Jennifer Engel Fisher, Weinfeld Education Group  
Ann Geddes, Maryland Coalition of Families

Kalman Hettleman, Independent Advocate  
Morgan Horvath, Abilities Network  
Nicole Joseph, Esq., Law Offices of Nicole Joseph  
Rosemary Kitzinger and Marjorie Guldan, Bright Futures, LLC  
Ande Kolp, The Arc Maryland  
Rachel London, Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council  
Sharon Manecke, National Foundation of the Blind of Maryland  
Leslie Seid Margolis, Disability Rights Maryland  
Ellen O'Neill, Atlantic Seaboard Dyslexia Education Center  
Rebecca Rienzi, Pathfinders for Autism  
Ronnetta Stanley, M.Ed., Loud Voices Together  
Guy Stephens, Alliance Against Seclusion and Restraint  
Maureen van Stone, Mallory Finn Legg, Alyssa Thorn, Project HEAL at Kennedy Krieger Institute