

House Bill 274

We are in support of HB724, which would give our son the option to attend school for an additional year. He is currently 18 and attends a 100% special needs school, on the diploma track. We believe that this bill would be a good step in trying to compensate for his loss of opportunities and skills due to the lockdown.

Prior to the lockdown, we had worked with our IEP team to focus on the skills that our son would need in a post high school world. The IEP had a heavy emphasis on transition skills needed for both higher education and employment. Once he graduates, virtually all services stop until he reaches the age of 21. The problem is, he currently isn't ready to continue on to college, nor is he in any way ready to live on his own. He requires significant supports, many of which will go away when he graduates.

One of his biggest problem areas is his social awareness and interactions. The IEP team had a plan in place to increase outings into the community and explore work options. The goal was to give him more real-world social interactions with support staff to facilitate. They were also working on some of the aspects of transitioning, with the hope that he would have more of an awareness and appreciation of job opportunities.

New concepts like these typically take a lot of time, repetition, and patience on the part of the educators in order for the concepts to be internalized. The IEP had provisions in place to deal with behaviors that might interfere with the process as well. It was a good plan, but then the lockdown happened.

During the lockdown, there have been virtually no transition services. Our son did an online DORS related project successfully, but there has been no follow up. While he can talk a bit about jobs in general, he doesn't fully understand what it has to do with him.

Additionally, during the lockdown he has lost a lot of ground with his social skills. He has done fairly well with the academic part of virtual learning, but he has no way to have any *real* interactions with the other students. He has learned that if they annoy him, he can mute the computer and not have to hear them. While that is a solution for him, it does not translate into the real world and interacting with managers and coworkers. He also doesn't understand that by not listening to others, he can't learn from them.

According to the current plan, our son will qualify for graduation before he is 21. Although we had a plan in place with the IEP to try and prepare him for the transition, we have now lost a critical year of time that was supposed to provide him with the experiences that he will need to become a functioning member of society. One extra year to try and get him back on track is a great start and we support the efforts outlined in HB274.

Thank you for your consideration.

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