

Education Advocacy Coalition For Students with Disabilities

HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL 724: SPECIAL EDUCATION—EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL SERVICES— PROLONGED SCHOOL CLOSURE

FEBRUARY 12, 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 724, which would permit an extension of special education services to address learning loss for transition-age students with disabilities commensurate with the length of time schools are closed for a prolonged closure of 10 or more consecutive school days.

House Bill 724 recognizes that during this past year when school buildings and many community programs which provide vocational opportunities for students with disabilities were closed, many students lost access to the education and transition services designed to prepare them for work and life in the community. The bill is designed to address learning loss sustained by these students with disabilities aged 17 and older who could not receive all of the services to which they were entitled because their school system was unable, despite good faith efforts, to implement those services during the pandemic. House Bill 724 also ensures that students' eligibility for transitioning youth services from the Developmental Disabilities Administration or for services from the Division of Rehabilitation Services will not be jeopardized by an extension of services to address a prolonged school closure.

Additionally, House Bill does not preclude a student's entitlement to compensatory services if, in addition to learning loss, the student has sustained a violation of their rights that could have been avoided, prolonged school closure notwithstanding.

Many families have expressed deep concern to EAC members about the looming exit of their older transition-age children from the school system, anxious because distance learning could not replace the hands-on experiences and in-person learning their children need. Transition plans begin for students when they are 14 and are intended to set a path for up to 7 more years of service. Without House Bill 724, unless families whose children need additional time in school are able to individually, family by family negotiate that extra time with their IEP team, many students will leave school less ready, less independent, less likely to be employed or to go on to higher education, and less likely to be connected to the adult services they may need.

For these reasons, the EAC supports House Bill 724. Please contact Leslie Seid Margolis, chairperson, at lesliem@disabilityrightsmd.org or at 410-370-5730 for further information.

Respectfully submitted,

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