

February 12, 2021

Position: Favorable

Background: This bill would require a county board of education to offer and provide to certain disabled and special education students (whose schools are subject to a prolonged school closure) the option to continue attending school **or receiving education services** after the student's anticipated graduation date. Furthermore, the bill would require a county board to provide a notice to the parents or guardians of eligible students about a student's option to continue attending school or receiving certain education services.

To whom it may concern,

My son is 18 years old, has an IEP, and is scheduled to graduate in June of 2021. He is currently attending a nonpublic therapeutic school for children with autism. While he will graduate with a diploma, he was supposed to get job coaching and work-based experience this year, his last, of high school.

When the pandemic hit, my son's services and education shifted to a fully remote format. This has been extremely challenging for us, as my son has a seizure disorder, and when he is on the computer all day, his seizure threshold is much lower than normal. He simply cannot attend classes 6 hours a day. It is too exhausting for him, and not worth the increased risk of having seizures.

Furthermore, because of the pandemic, he has been unable to get any work-based experience. He will be attending community college this semester to get coaching from his school about navigating college classes, but it will be for virtual school only (because of the pandemic).

Research shows that children with disabilities have significantly better outcomes when they get work experience prior to graduation. By better outcomes, I mean that they require less financial support from SSI, Medicaid, and the Developmental Disabilities Administration because they are more likely to be gainfully employed.

If my son can get another year of high school, he can get the site-based work experience and coaching that he was supposed to get this year.

While this does not apply to my son, there are other children who are set to graduate at 21 this year, who also need an additional year for the same reasons that my son does. If this bill passes, it will be important for those children to be allowed a full year to make the transition to adult services upon their exit from high school so they can have a smooth transition to state-supported funding.

I am grateful for your willingness to consider passing this bill to insure that students transitioning from the K-12 environment will have a chance to be successful as adults, contributing to the economy of the State of Maryland.

Sincerely,

Sarah Wayland, 301-768-8503, sarah.wayland@gmail.com