

Dr. H.A.Mezzomo; Senate Bill 266: Education - Voluntary Ethical Special Education Advocate Certificate Program; SUPPORT

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I hope you are well.

I am a speech-language pathologist with over 30 years of experience. During this time, I have had the pleasure of working with multiple students with special needs. These students receive educational supports based on their Individualized Education Program (IEP). In most instances, the members of the IEP team, which includes the parents, work well. They are able to come to agreements about what is best for the student. In other instances, the team members, generally the family, do not agree. This is when families opt to find a Special Education Advocate. However, there is no directory of advocates; there are no educational criteria to refer to oneself as an advocate; there is no recourse for the family when the advocate acts in bad faith.

This pro-family bill would help alleviate some of the challenges families face when seeking out someone skilled and knowledgeable in Special Education Law. Families have reported how difficult it has been to find an advocate, or how expensive it is to hire an advocate. This bill would aid in the creation of a directory. People who have completed coursework or certificate programs could be listed in a central location. The program is voluntary, so it would not diminish the role of grassroots advocacy programs. Additionally, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) would still prevail, allowing families to bring anyone they would like to an IEP meeting. Overall, SB 266 would provide a degree of consumer protection for families seeking special education advocates.

Thank you for your consideration on behalf of individuals with educational or developmental disabilities and their families. I hope that you will give SB 266 a favorable report.

Sincerely,

Dr. Helen Angela Mezzomo, CCC-SLP