

February 3, 2021

Maryland House of Delegates  
6 Bladen St.  
Annapolis, MD. 21401

**In Support of HB 724: Special Education – Education and Voc Services - Prolonged School Closure.**

Members of the House Ways and Means Committee.

As a parent and advocate for persons with disabilities, I can't help but support a bill like this one being proposed. The education and servicing of children with disabilities pre and post Covid-19 pandemic is crucial to their future success, to aid with enabling, improving and promoting positive student outcomes. Extending the education services past their graduation dates can certainly help with getting these students the necessary skills that they have been denied due to the current health pandemic and slow responses by school systems across the state and our country. It's one of many approaches that should and must be offered to students with disabilities.

They are children with a variety of disabilities struggling right now to access their education equal to their non-disabled peers. Too many times in recent months our children with disabilities have been forgotten about or simply not serviced due to a lack of funding, training or empathy for those children. These children need the services and supports that their schools have provided them with on a routine basis, in the past. Many of these children can not succeed without the service and supports which are tailored to their individual needs and included within an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and required by federal law. We need to do better for our kids and take all the steps necessary to ensure their future success.

In the Spring and Summer of 2020, the US Dept of Education has provided guidance to school system across the country to reinforce the obligation of school systems to meet the needs of their students with disabilities and IEPs. Not to waive that responsibility and work that needs to be done on both local, state and national levels of education. Why not consider and try alternatives like this bill has to offer?

There are children struggling right now to access their education. We cannot meet their needs by simply ignoring them, or trying to apply cookie cutter "solutions" which are not tailored to meet the individual needs of our disabled community of students nor meet the challenges posed by the conditions in an ever-changing world. These are real children, with real issues and possess real untapped potential.

Please help to support our students so that they can gain the skills and education so that they can reach their full potential.

Thank you for your time and your consideration of my testimony today.

Mr. Richard Ceruolo

Parent and advocate for persons living with disabilities | Parent Advocacy Consortium