



Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council

CREATING CHANGE • IMPROVING LIVES

Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

February 16, 2022

SB 617: Local School Systems—Equivalent Access Standards—Digital Tools
(Nonvisual Access Accountability Act for K-12 Education)

Position: Support with Sponsor Amendments

The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council (DD Council) is a statewide public policy organization that creates change to make it possible for people with developmental disabilities to live the lives they want with the support they need. The DD Council is led by people with developmental disabilities and their families. From that perspective, the DD Council strongly supports equal access to digital tools for all students with disabilities.

It is our understanding that this year’s legislation is broader and should ensure equal access, not just nonvisual access, to digital tools for all students with disabilities. To support that intent, we recommend the following amendments that strengthen the intent of equal access:

- On Page 2, line 13: **add INCLUDING, by nonvisual means**
- On Page 2, line 16: add “Equivalent Access” includes, **BUT IS NOT LIMITED TO:**
- On Page 3, lines 25: **add EQUIVALENT AND “nonvisual access”**

WHY is this legislation important?

- Access to information technology has been an issue for a number of students with disabilities. The pandemic created greater barriers, especially for students with “significant” developmental disabilities.
- Accessible information and technology is required by law, yet some students with disabilities still struggle to receive, use, and manipulate information. **Enforcement by local school systems and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) is critical to change this.**

WHAT does this legislation do?

- Requires local school systems to develop a process to evaluate digital tools under consideration for development or purchase.
- Requires vendors responding to a request for proposal by a local school system or the Maryland State Board of Education to submit an accessibility report that includes a product accessibility template.
- Requires local school systems, beginning in October 2024, to evaluate digital products and ensure they select the available product that will provide equivalent access for students with disabilities.

Students with disabilities must have equal access to information and technology in order to learn and succeed. SB 617 addresses some of the barriers facing students with disabilities, and enables students with disabilities to get and receive the same information, access the same services, and meaningfully participate in the same interactions as students without disabilities. For these reasons, the DD Council supports SB 617 with the amendments outlined above.

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