



TO: The Honorable Guy Guzzone, Chair
Members, Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
The Honorable Craig J. Zucker

FROM: Pamela Metz Kasemeyer
Andrew G. Vetter
410-244-7000

DATE: February 8, 2023

RE: **SUPPORT** – Senate Bill 311 – *Nonpublic Education – Special Education Placements – Renaming and Teacher Salaries (Teacher Pay Parity Act)*

For more than 60 years, Linwood Center has been providing life-changing programs and services for children and adults living with autism and related developmental disabilities. Linwood currently supports children and adults on the autism spectrum from jurisdictions throughout the State of Maryland. Linwood is among the relatively few programs in the United States and in the State of Maryland that provides comprehensive education and residential programs throughout the lifespan under one service umbrella. Linwood offers program continuity from childhood into adulthood, developing lifelong relationships with individuals living with autism from elementary school through retirement and old age. Linwood's accredited nonpublic special education program and licensed residential programs provide intensive positive behavioral supports and long-term educational and vocational services to Maryland's autism community. Linwood respectfully offers its **support** for Bill 311.

Senate Bill 311 provides a permanent solution to the challenges that Linwood and other special education schools face in recruiting and retaining qualified teachers, due to the lack of salary parity requirements in the current budget framework. It is not uncommon for a teacher to gain valuable experience teaching at Linwood only to have them leave for a better paying position in a public school system.

The need to establish teacher parity is even more critical, given the continued increase in public school teacher salaries that is expected as a result of the passage of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. The expected increases will exacerbate an already challenging environment for teacher recruitment and retention and will further widen the pay gap between teachers in public schools and teachers in special education schools. Furthermore, the current teacher workforce challenges must be addressed if Maryland is to continue to meet the expectations and requirements of the Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which mandates a "continuum of alternative placements to meet the needs of children with disabilities for special education and related services."

Senate Bill 311 will help to align teacher salaries for a special education school to the salaries of their counterparts who teach in the local school system where the special education school is located. The proposed increase in salaries for special education schools is phased in over three years. Senate Bill 311

also amends the term “non-public” from the statutory reference to special education schools. The amended name clarifies that the special education schools impacted by this legislation are an extension of the public schools and fulfill an essential function in meeting the particular educational needs of public school students, thereby enabling Maryland to meet the expectations and requirements of IDEA.

Passage of Senate Bill 311 will provide a simple and justified framework to provide parity in teacher salaries between public and special education schools, which not only helps to address the current recruitment and retention challenges of special education schools but also enhances Maryland’s educational framework and its compliance with IDEA. A favorable report is requested.