

To Whom it May Concern,

I am a resident of Baltimore City and a teacher in Baltimore City Public Schools. I am writing to ask that you give a favorable report out of committee for SB926 County Boards of Education - Due Process Proceedings for Children With Disabilities - Burden of Proof. This bill would level the playing field for families and students who disagree with their school system about an important decision regarding the placement of their child or special education services their child needs to be successful. This bill will simply require school systems to defend their position first if there is a disagreement about a student's program, placement or services that cannot be settled at the IEP table. Right now,, only parents who can afford expensive attorneys and expert witnesses have any chance of winning and even then they hardly ever do. The system isn't fair.

This bill particularly matters to me because I have a 15 year old daughter with Down syndrome. As we advocate for her needs and navigate the school system, we have experienced how parents are at a disadvantage when disagreements occur. Our families deserve to be able to have our voices heard on an equal playing field.

I am also a special education teacher in Baltimore City for the past 9 years. I know that the teachers unions are saying that this bill will add to teacher workloads, but teachers are already required to collect data about my child's progress at school. This bill will do nothing to add to their workload. In my teaching experience, I have not seen any indication that this bill would add any additional work for teachers. There is evidence from other states like New Jersey and New York that have already shifted the burden of proof that after a short period of increased cases the number of cases actually fell because school systems are more willing to mediate disagreements and find mutually agreeable solutions at the IEP table before going to court. This is a win for everyone!

Please help families across the state of Maryland who are trying to protect the rights of their children, and make the process of meeting the needs of kids who get special education services more fair and less contentious. I ask for a favorable vote for SB926

Thank you,
Brian Coughlin