

Education Advocacy Coalition

for Students with Disabilities

HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL 770: PUBLICLY FUNDED FULL-DAY PREKINDERGARTEN PROGRAM—TIER 1 CHILD— ALTERATION OF DEFINITION

DATE: FEBRUARY 22, 2023

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Education Advocacy Coalition for Students with Disabilities (EAC), a coalition of approximately 40 organizations and individuals concerned with education policy for students with disabilities in Maryland, supports House Bill 770, which would amend the definition of “Tier 1 child” for purposes of prekindergarten eligibility to include children with disabilities.

Under federal and state law, children with disabilities are entitled to a free appropriate public education from birth. Early intervention services for children from birth to three years are one component of meeting the needs of very young children with disabilities; prekindergarten is another; prekindergarten is essential to ensure that children with disabilities have the opportunity to learn the skills they will need in order to be prepared for kindergarten and beyond. However, the Maryland State Department of Education’s 2021-2022 school readiness report found that only 17% of young children with disabilities entered kindergarten fully ready to learn, as compared to 42% of their nondisabled peers.

House Bill 770 codifies existing state and federal requirements and aligns with the intent of the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future. The Blueprint requires that three and four year old children with disabilities be given priority in prekindergarten expansion slots, regardless of income. However, because Tier 1 children are defined separately in the law, children with disabilities may not receive public prekindergarten services, or public prekindergarten programs may not receive funding through the Blueprint to serve children with disabilities without the definition change proposed by House Bill 770.

Prekindergarten programs offer young children with and without disabilities the opportunity to learn and play together and to develop the foundational skills that will enable them to enter kindergarten prepared and able to benefit from the education offered to them. For these reasons, the EAC strongly supports House Bill 770.

For more information or if questions, please contact: Leslie Seid Margolis, Chairperson, at lesliem@disabilityrightsmd.org or 443-692-2505.

Respectfully submitted,

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The Maryland Education Coalition joins this testimony.