

House Bill 469 – Children with Disabilities – Special Education Services - Eligibility

Hearing Date: In the House - Hearing 2/15 at 1:00 p.m.

Dear Members of the Ways and Means Committee:

I am writing to you in hopes of your support for *House Bill 469 – Children with Disabilities – Special Education Services - Eligibility*

As a proud parent of a student who attends public school in Prince George's County. I am supportive of opportunities this bill will offer to our special needs students who are educated in Maryland public schools.

My son, Montgomery, is educated in a community reference instruction (CRI) program at Charles H. Flowers Highschool where he receives his education in a self- contained classroom. In addition to academic classroom instruction, he receives Speech/Language, Occupational Therapy (OT), Physical Therapy, Adaptive Physical Education (PE) and Assistive Technology (AT) services

It is important that all students with disabilities receive an appropriate special education and related services until they are 21 years old (or is 21 years old and has completed 15 or fewer years of primary and secondary education). This requirement must apply across Maryland districts and counties. The start (before or after Labor Day) of the school year should not directly impact when the public education should cease.

All students, regardless of ability, have been impacted by COVID-19. Sadly, children with disabilities are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and the containment response.

Prior to COVID-19 families such as ours were already marginalized, and this has only worsened during the pandemic. As a vulnerable population, children with disabilities have not been the focus of much discussion during the pandemic, likely because the disease disproportionately impacts older individuals.

Nonetheless, the focus must be on children with disabilities to mitigate the negative consequences of COVID-19 pandemic. Older students (middle and high school) have lost out on community-based instruction (CBI) activities and experiences; independent life skill training, and therapies such as speech, occupational and physical therapy. CBI activities resumed at the start of FY 2022 school year.

Please do not allow older (approaching 21) students to fail to benefit from the educational and therapeutic programs/activities. The students need those life skills and education to be productive members of society and have a sense of purpose.

As you know, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) makes available a free appropriate public education to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children.

Monty and his peers deserve and have a right to a free appropriate public education within a Least restrictive environment (LRE).

Please support this bill so that students can receive an enriched education experience and have the ability to take advantage of the opportunities that are available to the residents of the State of Maryland and citizens of the USA. Another important note - Those older students, are citizens and they are eligible to vote.

As parents, we entrust the school staff with our most vulnerable children every day. Being able to collaborate and have transparency will enable us all to work together in a concerted effort for the betterment of our children. Please support House Bill 469.

Sincerely,

Kim G. Tart

Kim Tart
1302 Fairfield Drive
District Heights, Maryland 20747
tartkg@prodigy.net