

**Education Advocacy Coalition
for Students with Disabilities**

HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL 5: EDUCATION—PLAYGROUND ACCESSIBILITY—COMMUNICATION BOARDS

JANUARY 24, 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, submits this testimony in support of House Bill 5, which would require county boards of education to construct communication boards on every school playground by October of 2028.

Communication boards, defined in House Bill 5 as devices that display photos, symbols, or illustrations to enable individuals with limited language skills to express themselves, can provide much-needed accessibility to children with disabilities, empowering them to relay their wishes effectively and independently. Although physical access to playgrounds remains an issue for many children and is a separate issue of concern for EAC members, we also recognize that once on a playground, children with disabilities often are deprived of the ability to express choices, such as what game a group of children should play during recess. Installation of communication boards will be a helpful step towards furthering meaningful inclusion of children with disabilities by giving them language support to participate with their peers without disabilities. It is essential that these boards be accessible to all children; for this reason, any communication boards installed on playgrounds must also include nonvisual access and must be installed at a height that makes them accessible to all children.

We trust that implementation of House Bill 5 would be in accord with best practices, including guidance available from organizations that have been working on playground communication board and accessibility issues.

For these reasons, the EAC supports House Bill 5. For more information, please contact Leslie Seid Margolis, Chairperson, at 443-692-2505 or at lesliem@disabilityrightsmd.org.

Respectfully submitted,

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Additionally, the Maryland Education Coalition joins this testimony.