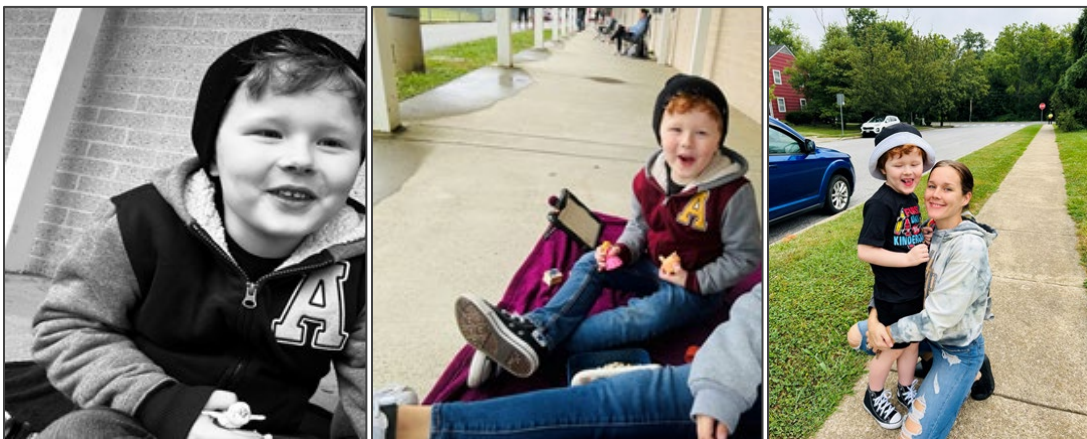


Good morning my name is Meghan Konka and I stand here before you this morning as a mother of a special needs child.

On January 7th of 2020, my son was diagnosed with moderate nonverbal autism, global developmental delays, Pica, and sensory processing disorder. Shortly after that diagnosis, he received a feeding disorder diagnosis from Mt Washington. SB0797 is so important to families like mine, and I believe this bill will be path the way for other states to make important and much needed changes to special education. This bill will establish and provide access to advocates, consultants and attorneys for the special education program. It will not only give access to supports that parents and caregivers need but I believe it will also reduce the number of families that request mediation because they will have someone with the right expertise providing guidance and support through the special education process.

When the time came for my son to start school, I knew that he needed special accommodations and support, so I started the IEP process. I realized after my first IEP team meeting that it really wasn't a team meeting at all, it was me against the school. To give you an example, my son is nonverbal, and I am currently advocating for more speech services in school. At the present moment, my son receives two–30-minute speech sessions a week in the classroom setting which is not enough for him. I ended up hiring an advocate to assist me with navigating through this process, but I started to think about others in my position and what happens to the parents/caretakers who can't afford an expensive service like this, and most importantly, what happens to the children? I will tell you- children go through school not getting the services and supports they so desperately need to thrive and improve quality of life because they can't afford to pay someone to advocate for services that should be available to them without pushback from the school system.

I respectfully request a favorable report on SB0797, it's time that we not only acknowledge the struggles and challenges families face but do something to change it.



Picture of my son and I

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