

**FAVORABLE**  
**Senate Bill 797**  
**Education – Access to Attorneys, Advocates, and Consultants for Special**  
**Education Program and Fund - Established**

**Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee**  
**February 23, 2024**

**Christian Gobel**  
**Government Relations**

The Maryland State Education Association supports Senate Bill 797. Senate Bill 797 establishes an Access to Attorneys, Advocates, and Consultants for Special Education Fund and Program. The purpose of the program is to direct resources to eligible students and their families to provide access to legal, advocacy, or consultant services for issues that may arise regarding the provision of special education services. Under the bill, the Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service is responsible for administering the program and fund.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our almost 900,000 students so they can pursue their dreams. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3 million-member National Education Association (NEA).

MSEA believes that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and state laws ensure all children with disabilities will be educated in the least restrictive environment. Additionally, MSEA believes in making every effort to provide positive learning experiences and appropriate placements for all students.

Senate Bill 797 will significantly improve access to resources for students with disabilities and their families who are working with local school systems to determine certain decisions regarding the education of their child. At times, students with disabilities and their families may disagree with local school systems about what is



best for the education of the child and will need assistance to advocate for their position.

The IDEA and its dispute resolution processes and procedures are undoubtedly complex and difficult to navigate. Senate Bill 797 will support students with disabilities and their families to ensure they have access to attorneys, advocates, or consultants with expertise in special education to equip families with the resources they need to advocate for their child's education. A lack of access to resources should not influence the educational opportunities a child receives in their public education. MSEA appreciates the sponsors for bringing forward this legislation and supports its passage.

**We strongly urge the committee to issue a Favorable Report on Senate Bill 797.**