

FAVORABLE
House Bill 1237
State Department of Education – Task Force to Study the Maryland Online
Special Education System

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
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The Maryland State Education Association supports House Bill 1237. As amended, House Bill 1237 establishes a task force to study the Maryland Online Special Education System. Under the bill, the task force is charged with: i) studying the effectiveness, functionality, and usability of the Maryland Online Individualized Family Service Plan and the Maryland Online Individualized Education Plan; ii) determining the availability of other platforms and how other platforms compare to the current system; iii) evaluating the costs of maintaining or upgrading the current system, or alternatively, acquiring a different platform; and iv) making recommendations to maintain and upgrade the system or replace the system with another platform as determined by the task force. The task force would be composed of key stakeholders including educators, parents who have students with IEPs, advocates, and representatives from the Maryland State Department of Education. The task force must report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly on or before June 1, 2025.

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 appreciates the sponsor for introducing House Bill 1237. Improving working conditions for special education teachers is critical to attract more individuals to enter the profession and retain existing special education teachers. In the 2022-2023 school



year, the Maryland State Department of Education reported approximately 2,572 educator vacancies statewide.¹ The certification area with the highest vacancy rate was special education, with approximately 581 vacancies.² The reported vacancy data corroborates what MSEA's local unions hear from our special education members across the state. Special educators are leaving the profession in droves, either to teach in general education or to leave education entirely, because of special educators' high caseloads and current working conditions.

Special education obligates educators to prepare a significant amount of paperwork to demonstrate compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. A well-performing online platform system is crucial to ensure educators can serve their students well and efficiently satisfy their compliance and data keeping requirements under the IDEA.

However, for many years educators in Maryland have expressed dissatisfaction and frustration with the current Maryland Online IEP system due to its poor functionality. Special educators spend hours upon hours preparing their students' IEPs in the Maryland Online IEP system and should not be burdened with a poor performing platform to carry out their essential duties. A task force dedicated to upgrading the current online system or evaluating the possibility of an alternative system has meaningful potential to improve the educational experience for students with disabilities and their families, while also raising the working conditions for special education teachers across the state.

We urge the committee to issue a Favorable Report on House Bill 1237.

¹ Maryland State Department of Education, *Maryland General Assembly Ways & Means Committee Briefing – MSDE Updates on the Maryland Educator Workforce* (pg. 144 of 214 of the pdf file) (Sept. 12, 2023), https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/meeting_material/2023/w&m%20-%20133389929402352101%20-%20Ways%20and%20Means%209-12-23%20Briefings%20-%20Presentations%20-%20Revised.pdf.

² *Id.*