



SB797- Education - Access to Attorneys, Advocates, and Consultants for Special Education Program and Fund – Established

Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment, Budget and Taxation

Date: February 21, 2024

Position: Favorable

The Maryland Coalition of Families: Maryland Coalition of Families (MCF) is a statewide nonprofit organization that provides family peer support services at no cost to families who have a loved one with a mental health, substance use, or problem gambling disorder. Using their personal experience as parents, caregivers and other loved ones, our staff provide emotional support, resource connection and systems navigation as well as support groups and educational trainings and workshops.

Many of the families that our staff support are families with children. Last year we served 4,603 Families and nearly 70% were families with children. We provided these families support and had given a total of 677 education resources. MCF supports this bill for several reasons.

- Across the state we have supported and helped families navigate the IEP process. It can be grueling and frustrating for families at times when certain things are not followed through on multiple occasions and the child has an identified need. We have seen some children fall behind grade levels because IEP meeting requests are ignored or partially implemented. Leaving families in a continuous battle.
- Families our bilingual team serves have increased in numbers within the past two years. This bill will provide these families who meet the requirements equitable access to these advocates and attorneys.
- Having Advocates and attorneys for low-income families to help legally navigate this process is crucial in getting the child the help that they need in an educational setting when certain circumstances are inhibiting and unjust.



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