

Cristina Easton  
Arc of Maryland  
(410) 925-0837  
[cjacob916@gmail.com](mailto:cjacobs916@gmail.com)  
21212

Thank you delegates and members of the committee for your time and attention, and to all who have put work towards making this bill possible. My name is Cristina Easton and I am here to give favorable testimony for SB0797. I am here as a former special educator and Baltimore City Schools principal and as a parent. I have sat in countless IEP meetings and written IEPs as an educator of other people's children, and I am proud of the relationships I built with families. That doesn't mean families always trusted me or the school. Trust was built over time. I am now the parent of a 4 and a half year old non-speaking autistic boy, and despite my professional experience, I am terrified and overwhelmed. Approaching our first IEP meeting, I have not built relationships with the school system that will receive my child. Having access to advocacy or legal advice should challenges arise would not only allow me to feel prepared and secure in my questions and goals for my child, but also help me feel confident that everyone at the table is accountable to my child's best interests so that I can begin to build trust with a large system that might struggle to meet his specific needs.

Raising a high support needs child is expensive. Despite having health insurance and a decent income, my family's financial health suffers the weight of copays, additional services, equipment, and specialized childcare and programs - not to mention time spent researching and learning about supports we need. With every phone call, dollar spent, hour spent researching, I CANNOT imagine the burden on families that don't share my professional experience and resources. This bill addresses both the research and cost burden on families by requiring dissemination of information about the program to families, and by using an income cutoff of 150% the MLSC guidelines. I ask that you give this bill a favorable review for the sake of my child and the many children behind him who need it even more.