



House Bill 903 - Education - Access to Attorneys, Advocates, and Consultants for Special Education Program and Fund - Established Ways & Means – February 21, 2024, 1 p.m. Position: Favorable

The Maryland Out of School Time Network (MOST) is a statewide organization dedicated to closing opportunity gaps by expanding both the quantity and quality of afterschool and summer learning opportunities for school-aged young people. MOST serves as the backbone organization for the Maryland Coalition for Community Schools. The Maryland Coalition for Community Schools, founded in 2016, advocates for student and family success by leading the charge to expand the Community School Model in Maryland. The Maryland Education Coalition (MEC) advocates for adequate funding, equitable policies, and transparent accountability statewide.

Parents and caregivers often serve as both experts and advocates for their children in the context of identifying disabilities and providing appropriate and adequate accommodations. However, parents and caregivers often are not experts in the application of complex laws and regulations governing Special Education. In many cases, families and students are best served when they are represented by qualified legal counsel. Unfortunately, these resources are beyond the reach of too many families and demand for services currently outstrips supply.

MOST, MD4CS, and MEC support House Bill 903 which establishes a special, non-lapsing fund to be implemented with Maryland Volunteer Lawyers to ensure families, particularly those without means to engage private counsel, are supported appropriately as they navigate the Special Education process.

This pro-active investment will lead to better outcomes for students and make access to legal representation more equitable. We applaud the full range of sponsors of this bill and urge the Ways & Means Committee to provide a favorable report for House Bill 903.

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