



YahalomMD

PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES NAVIGATING THE SPECIAL NEEDS JOURNEY
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HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

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SENATE BILL 797

EDUCATION - ACCESS TO ATTORNEYS, ADVOCATES, AND CONSULTANTS FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM AND FUND – ESTABLISHED

TESTIMONY OF YAHALOM MD DIRECTOR RABBI ARIEL SADWIN

SUPPORT

Yahalom Maryland is the needs and disability division of Agudath Israel of Maryland. “Yahalom” is the Hebrew word for diamond, and Yahalom Maryland believes that every child is as valuable as a diamond and as precious as a jewel. We serve as the point of contact for individuals, families, and local organizations within the Orthodox Jewish community who seek assistance in navigating issues related to physical, intellectual, and developmental disabilities.

Senate Bill 797 would establish the Access to Attorneys, Advocates, and Consultants for Special Education (AAACSE) Program and the AAACSE Fund to help low-income families who have to navigate the legal side of an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Navigating the IEP or IFSP process can be daunting for many. The difficulty is exacerbated for those who also are economically disadvantaged. The burden of proof placed upon families of children with special educational needs often creates great stress and hardship for families and advocates. Parents are forced to use invest large amounts of precious time and money just to try to get their child the IEP or IFSP they need and deserve, and are forced into an adversarial relationship with a system that has far more resources and power than they do. Many times, they are not even aware of options that ought to be made available to them. The unfamiliar and daunting process can often prove too much for them, and even if they succeed, they pay a steep price in stress and worry.

Allowing these families access to attorneys who are familiar with the issues would allow many to navigate the process with greater ease and help ensure that a helping hand is being extended to those who need it. We therefore respectfully ask for a favorable report on House Bill 903. Thank you.