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Hello Senators,

I am Alita-Geri Carter, the Chief Consultant and Founder of Qualequity Access, LLC., a nurse consultancy driven to achieve quality, equity, access, and accessibility for children and youth with special needs using data. I'm requesting a favorable report as amended for SB0797.

The data tells the story of why SB0797 stands to support a critical need for families of children who are differently-abled. The exorbitant costs families bear for advocacy underscores the urgency of legislative action. As a community, we must prioritize equity, quality, access, and accessibility in education. According to one report by the Maryland State Department of Special Education (the report published in December 2023 titled *Blueprint for Maryland's Future*):

“Many teachers state they don't know how to read an IEP or how to implement it, even in an inclusion classroom. It's also been stated that while this type of training is offered, it is not required.”

With this information, we should ask, as parents, community members, and stakeholders, “Are there equitable opportunities for children with disabilities to exist in the learning environment?” This needs to be investigated, and bills such as HB 890 are a good start.

What data do we have now?

The percentage of youth graduating with IEPs with regular diplomas decreased, while the percentage of youth with IEPs dropping out of high school increased in FY 2022 compared to FY 2021. The percentage of youth in FFY 2022 with IEP graduating from high school with regular diploma was 68.87%, a nearly a 6% decrease from FFY 2021, where the percentage was 74.09% (Maryland State Department of Education, 2024, slide 18)

The percentage of youth with IEPs dropping out of high school in FFY 2022 was 17.61%, an increase of 4.35% from FFY 2021 ((Maryland State Department of Education, 2024, slide 19)

In a report from September of 2022, 34.4% of eligible students had not started compensatory/recovery services, and only 14 counties out of 24 had initiated any form of compensatory education/recovery services (slide 46 of 105 Deep Dive: Students with Disabilities Part 1 published on 9/27/2022)

As of 9/1/2022, only 14 counties had initiated delivery of compensatory education/recovery services of 24 (slide 47 of 105 Deep Dive: Students with Disabilities Part 1 9/27/2022).



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Maryland also recognizes that students of color with disabilities often receive harsher punishments concerning discipline, " Which can cost families hundreds or thousands of families to hire an advocate to prevent and appeal (slide 11 Deep Dive Part II 2/28/2023)

In 2022, 398 Mediation requests were made, and only 89 were resolved, approximately 22%.
In 2022, 300 Due process requests and only eight received decisions, approximately 2.67%.

In closing, it is evident that today's data merely scratches the surface of the complexities within Maryland's System. The concerning trends highlighted, from the lack of teacher training to the disparities in graduation rates and access to compensatory services and disproportionate discipline administered to minoritized children with needs, demand immediate attention and systemic reform, which can be supported by access to attorneys, advocates, and consultants. While absent from the statistics, my story underscores the urgent need for initiatives like SB0797. Please do not hesitate to contact me for further discussion or questions.

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Appendix A

Additional Data from Maryland Department of Education

Deep Dive Part I slide 54

2022: 398 Mediation requests made; only 89 were resolved, approximately 22%

Top 5 Mediation Themes

1. IEP development
2. Placement determinations
3. Evaluation/assessment
4. IEP implementation
5. Compensatory services

Deep Dive Part I slide 55

2022: 300 Due process requests only 8 received decisions, approximately 2.67%

Top 5 Due Process Themes

1. Compensatory services
2. IEP implementation: accommodations, supplementary aids, and services
3. IEP implementation: placement
4. IEP implementation: speech/language services
5. Independent educational evaluation procedures



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References

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<https://marylandpublicschools.org/stateboard/Documents/2022/0927/DataDeepDiveStudentsWithDisabilities.pdf>

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In Maryland Public Schools. Maryland Public Schools.

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