

Education Advocacy Coalition for Students with Disabilities

SENATE BUDGET AND TAXATION AND EDUCATION, ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEES

SENATE BILL 97 – EDUCATION –YOUTH ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM--ESTABLISHMENT

DATE: JANUARY 15, 2025

POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT

The Education Advocacy Coalition for Students with Disabilities (EAC), a coalition of nearly 50 organizations and individuals concerned with education policy for students with disabilities in Maryland, provides this testimony in support of Senate Bill 97 with amendments. Senate Bill 97 will establish a mentorship program that would provide grants to organizations that serve early adolescent children and young adults who attend public school in Baltimore City or Baltimore County, qualify for free or reduced price meals, and are members of a historically disadvantaged group who face obstacles to achievement. The EAC supports the establishment of this worthy program and suggests an amendment making clear that adolescents and young adults with disabilities must be included within the scope of the program.

Children and youth with disabilities historically have faced significant barriers to achievement; test scores consistently show a wide gap between the academic achievement of students with and without disabilities at every level—elementary, middle and high school. A disproportionate number of students and young adults with disabilities live in poverty. Further, young adults exiting the school system face barriers to employment. Mentorship is an essential component of the solution to these longstanding issues. It is important to note that a number of students with disabilities attend nonpublic special education schools at public expense because their local school system has determined that it is unable to meet the students' educational needs. These students, too, should be eligible for the program.

Therefore, the EAC proposes the following amendments:

Page 2, Lines 1-2: **“RESIDE IN OR ATTEND ANY PUBLIC SCHOOL IN BALTIMORE CITY OR BALTIMORE COUNTY OR RESIDE IN BALTIMORE CITY OR BALTIMORE COUNTY AND ATTEND A NONPUBLIC SPECIAL EDUCATION SCHOOL FUNDED BY THE BALTIMORE CITY OR BALTIMORE COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM:”**

Page 2, lines 6- 7: **“ ARE MEMBERS OF A HISTORICALLY DISADVANTAGED GROUP, INCLUDING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, WHO FACE OBSTACLES TO ACHIEVEMENT THAT MAY BE EFFECTIVELY MITIGATED BY LONG-TERM MENTORSHIP.**

Page 2, Section D: Add new subsection (3): **DELIVERED TO PARTICIPANTS IN ACCORD WITH THE REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS REQUIREMENTS OF THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT AND, IF APPLICABLE, SECTION 504 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973.**

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If enacted, Senate Bill 97 could make a significant difference in the lives of students and young adults with disabilities. For this reason, the EAC supports Senate Bill 97 with amendments.

For more information, please contact Leslie Seid Margolis, Co-Chairperson, at 443-692-2505 or at lesliem@disabilityrightsmd.org.

Respectfully submitted,

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