

# Education Advocacy Coalition

for Students with Disabilities

## **SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

### **SENATE BILL 851**

#### **Public Schools—Individuals with Disabilities—Main Entrance Accessibility and Emergency Planning**

**March 5, 2025**

#### **POSITION: SUPPORT**

The Education Advocacy Coalition for Students with Disabilities (EAC) is a coalition of nearly 50 organizations and individuals concerned with education policy for students with disabilities in Maryland. The EAC supports Senate Bill 851, which would require each county board of education to publish on its website and report to the Maryland General Assembly on the number of main entrances to public school buildings in the county that are not accessible for individuals who use wheelchairs and not in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Additionally, Senate Bill 851 would require each local school system to provide a copy of its emergency plan to the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), which would then be required to analyze the plans and report to the General Assembly as to whether each local school system is in compliance with the Department's guidelines and regulations.

Senate Bill 851 has the laudable purpose of bringing school accessibility issues to the fore; although this bill does not require the jurisdiction or local school system to make accessibility modifications to its schools, the reporting requirements will enable decisionmakers to determine the extent of the lack of accessibility and to then determine how to proceed. Additionally, the requirement that MSDE analyze emergency plans will provide critical information about how local school systems have considered accessibility issues for the students, staff and visitors to their schools.

Schools are hubs of activity for students, families, staff, and community members. It is important for the public to know if a school's main entrance is accessible. Some schools are quite large and have many entrances; nobody should have to circumnavigate a school building to try to figure out how to get inside. Neither should anybody in a building have to worry about exiting in an emergency because an appropriate, compliant plan is not in place.

For these reasons, the EAC supports Senate Bill 851.

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Education Advocacy Coalition Testimony: Senate Bill 851

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