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Dear Chairwoman Atterbeary, Delegate Denise Roberts, Delegate Kent Roberson, Delegate Chao Wu, and Delegate Jessica Feldmark,

I am Alita-Geri Carter, the mother of two disabled children, a pediatric nurse practitioner, and the owner of Qualequity Access, LLC a consultancy that advocates for quality, equity, access, and accessibility in healthcare and education. I am writing to express my opposition to House Bill 129, which proposes altering the membership of the Maryland State Board of Education to include a school principal. While this change may appear to enhance representation, it fails to address systemic challenges impacting the nearly 106,000 special education students who attend Maryland public schools.

Administrators, such as principals, play a critical role in special education decision-making as mandatory members of Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams. However, there is currently no statewide requirement ensuring they receive training on IEPs, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, or Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Without this essential knowledge, these administrators are often ill-equipped to support and uphold the rights of students with disabilities. Appointing a principal to the State Board without requiring substantive training in disability law does little to improve the quality of education or equity for students with disabilities.

Additionally, the composition of the State Board has historically included former principals, central office staff, and other education professionals who, while experienced in school administration, may not have the lived experience of navigating the system as a parent of a child with disabilities. Simply renaming a board position to include a current principal does not equate to meaningful reform or an increase in accountability for special education services.

Furthermore, HB 129 mandates that the parent representative on the Board be selected from individuals recommended by the Maryland PTA. This requirement is exclusionary and politically motivated. It disregards the realities faced by many parents of children with disabilities, who often struggle to participate in PTA activities due to their child's medical needs, therapy appointments, and other caregiving responsibilities. The opportunity for



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parent participation should be equitable and inclusive, ensuring that diverse perspectives, particularly those of parents with direct experience navigating special education systems, are represented.

Instead of passing HB 129 in its current form, I urge lawmakers to prioritize reforms that will create meaningful change, including:

1. **Mandating Special Education Training for School Leaders** – Principals and other administrators should be required to receive comprehensive training on IDEA, Section 504, and ADA compliance to ensure they can fulfill their obligations under federal and state laws.
2. **Expanding Parent Representation** – The selection of parent members should not be limited to PTA recommendations but should include diverse parent voices, particularly those with firsthand experience advocating for children with disabilities.
3. **Ensuring Board Diversity in Experience and Knowledge** – The Board should include members with direct lived experience in special education, not just school administrators or central office personnel.

I ask for an unfavorable disposition for HB 129 in its current form and instead advocate for policies that will result in meaningful improvements in special education oversight, accountability, and student success.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter further and urge you to stand with Maryland families supporting education investments and impactful legislation.

Kind regards,

Alita-Geri Carter, RN, MSN, CPNP-PC, BCPA