

Written Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 0863 with Recommended Amendments

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Eboni Burch, a Prince George's County resident, mental health professional, and parent of a child with disabilities enrolled in a special education program within Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS). I support Senate Bill 863 and respectfully offer several amendments to strengthen the bill and ensure it meaningfully improves services for students with disabilities.

Through my experience navigating the special education system, I have observed gaps between the supports outlined in Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and what is implemented in practice. Many classrooms lack sufficient certified special educators and trained staff to implement IEPs with fidelity. As a result, students may not consistently receive the services and accommodations to which they are legally entitled.

Another concern is the reliance on classroom aides to collect ABC (Antecedent–Behavior–Consequence) behavioral data without appropriate training. While ABC data can be valuable for identifying triggers and informing behavioral plans, inaccurate or inconsistent data collection can lead to ineffective interventions. Independent oversight or third-party auditing of behavioral data practices would help ensure reliability and accountability.

Students with disabilities benefit most when staff can recognize triggers, identify early warning signs of dysregulation, and implement proactive supports. Without proper training, responses often become reactive rather than preventative, which can negatively affect both the student and the classroom environment.

To strengthen SB 863 and prevent unintended consequences, I respectfully recommend the following amendments:

Recommended Amendments

1. Safeguard Against Withholding Funds Due to Staffing Turnover

The bill should include safeguards preventing the restriction or withholding of funds from school districts due to high turnover among dedicated aides or paraprofessionals. These positions frequently experience high turnover due to compensation and workload challenges. Penalizing districts financially could unintentionally reduce services for students with disabilities.

2. Medicaid Reimbursement for Aide Services

The bill should encourage or require school systems to pursue Medicaid reimbursement for eligible dedicated aide and behavioral support services. Leveraging Medicaid funding can help sustain staffing and expand services without placing additional financial strain on school systems.

3. Independent Behavioral Training

Professional development related to behavioral intervention and de-escalation should be provided by qualified mental health professionals or behavioral specialists, preferably external to the local school district. Training should focus on evidence-based behavioral supports, crisis prevention, and working effectively with neurodivergent students in educational environments.

4. Expand Coverage to All Aides

The bill should apply to all classroom aides and paraprofessionals supporting students with disabilities, not only one-on-one dedicated aides. Many aides rotate among students or support the entire classroom and play a direct role in implementing behavioral and instructional supports.

5. Clarify Roles of Support Personnel

The legislation should clearly distinguish the roles of dedicated aides, paraprofessionals, and Crisis Intervention Resource Teachers (CIRTs). Dedicated aides are often asked to perform multiple duties beyond their training. The bill should define these roles, outline appropriate secondary duties, and require training aligned with those responsibilities.

For students requiring intensive behavioral support, the legislation should also encourage school systems to employ or contract Registered Behavior Technicians (RBTs) or similar certified professionals to implement evidence-based behavioral interventions under qualified supervision.

Conclusion

Students with disabilities deserve classrooms staffed with trained professionals who can implement IEPs effectively and provide proactive behavioral supports. Senate Bill 863 represents an important step toward improving accountability and student outcomes.

With the amendments outlined above, this legislation can better support school systems while ensuring that vulnerable students receive the services they need.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to issue a **favorable report on Senate Bill 863 with the recommended amendments.**

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Eboni Burch, Psy.D.

Prince George's County Resident