

# **EDUCATION ADVOCACY COALITION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS

**SENATE BILL 711**

**FAMILY LAW—CHILD NEGLECT DEFINITION—ALTERATION**

FEBRUARY 26, 2026

**POSITION: LETTER OF INFORMATION**

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, submits this Letter of Information for Senate Bill which alters the child neglect definition to include a parent or guardian's failure or refusal to provide their child's education.

The EAC appreciates the intent of Senate Bill 711, which recognizes the importance of school attendance for academic success. Many EAC members represent or work with families who have children with significant disabilities for whom school attendance is difficult. This bill does not consider that a parent or guardian's failure to send their child to school may be related to the child's disability.

EAC members have represented families of students with autism, anxiety, or severe mental illness. Some students may have experienced trauma, injury, or bullying. Others may be nonverbal, they may have challenging behaviors, or they may be school-phobic because of a previous event. What may look like absenteeism may, in fact, be school refusal or non-attendance for disability-related reasons.

In some cases, school employees may play a role in the child's inability to access instruction. Many families seek assistance from their school system's Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, asking the team to help design a plan to get the child to school or, in the most desperate of situations, to approve home instruction on the basis of emotional crisis. Many times, home instruction is refused or is not authorized more than once, or the IEP team denies responsibility for helping to figure out how to get the child to school.

As advocates for all students with disabilities throughout Maryland, the EAC submits this letter of information to highlight that Senate Bill 711 could unintentionally create a punitive response to a situation that is related to disability and should be approached thoughtfully.

Education Advocacy Coalition Testimony: Senate Bill 711, page 2

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Respectfully submitted,

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