

EDUCATION ADVOCACY COALITION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

JUDICIARY

HOUSE BILL 834

FAMILY LAW—CHILD NEGLECT DEFINITION—ALTERATION

FEBRUARY 19, 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 House Bill 834 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 House Bill 834, 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 House Bill 834 could unintentionally create a punitive response to a situation that is related to disability and should be approached thoughtfully.

Education Advocacy Coalition Testimony: House Bill 834, page 2

Contact: Beth Benevides, ebenevides@hussmanfoundation.org, Co-Chair, Education Advocacy Coalition, 443-590-3164

Respectfully submitted,

Selene Almazan, Attorney

Rene Averitt-Sanzone, Parents Place of Maryland

Linda Barton, Education Consultant

Beth Benevides, Autism Society of Maryland; Co-Chair, Education Advocacy Coalition

Ellen Callegary, Attorney (retired)

Melanie Carlos, Partnership for Extraordinary Minds (xMinds)

Michelle Davis, ABCs for Life Success

Beth Ann Hancock, Charting the Course

Mallory Legg, Project HEAL at Kennedy Krieger Institute

Rachel London, Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council

Beth Nolan, Education Team Allies

Ellen O'Neill, Atlantic Seaboard Dyslexia Education Center

Ronza Othman, National Federation of the Blind of Maryland

Kate Rabb, The Law Offices of Joseph & Rabb

Rebecca Rienzi, Pathfinders for Autism

Jaime Seaton, BGS Law

Leslie Seid Margolis, Disability Rights Maryland

Kelly Spanoghe, Education Consultant

Ronnetta Stanley, Loud Voices Together Education Advocacy Group

Wayne Steedman, Maryland Special Education Lawyers and The Steedman Law Group

Rick Tyler and Ellie Mitchell (Co-Chairs), Maryland Education Coalition (MEC)