

HB 1368 – Shifra’s Act
Position: Support

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Cheri Dowling, and I am submitting this testimony as a parent in strong support of HB 1368, Shifra’s Act. I am the parent of a Deaf young man with intellectual disabilities who attended the Maryland School for the Deaf, and through my experiences as a parent I understand how important it is for families to be fully informed about the services their children are supposed to receive through their Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Parents rely on schools and service providers to communicate clearly when services are delivered as planned—and just as importantly, when they are not.

HB 1368 strengthens transparency by requiring written notice to parents when IEP services are **missed, interrupted, incomplete, or not initiated as planned**. This type of communication is essential to ensuring that parents remain informed and active members of the IEP team.

While I am submitting this testimony as a parent, I also work professionally with families through the Family Support and Resource Center at the Maryland School for the Deaf. In this role, I support families of deaf and hard of hearing children **across Maryland**, including those whose children attend public schools, private schools, and the Maryland School for the Deaf. Through this work, I consistently hear from parents who discover months later that their child’s service provider was frequently unavailable, resulting in repeated missed services. By the time families learn about the missed sessions, valuable instructional time—and opportunities for progress—have already been lost.

This bill addresses that gap by ensuring greater transparency, communication, and shared accountability between schools and families. When parents are informed promptly about missed services, they are better able to work collaboratively with schools to address concerns and ensure that their children receive the support they need.

HB 1368 reinforces a core principle of special education—partnership with families. Parents cannot be meaningful members of the IEP team if they are unaware that services are not being delivered as planned.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to give HB 1368 a favorable report.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions or provide additional information if helpful.

Sincerely,
Cheri Dowling