

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee:

I respectfully submit this testimony in strong support of House Bill 901, with two strengthening amendments.

House Bill 901 addresses a critical gap in the educational system: the period between when a child receives a qualified external diagnosis and when a school completes its internal evaluation. During this interim period, students are often left without appropriate supports despite credible medical evidence identifying a disability. This gap can lead to academic regression, behavioral escalation, emotional distress, and unnecessary disciplinary action.

As both a parent of a child with a disability and a mental health professional, I have personally experienced the consequences of this delay. Despite obtaining a comprehensive external autism evaluation conducted by qualified experts using standardized diagnostic instruments, our school system declined to recognize the diagnosis while conducting its internal review. As a result, my child remained in an inappropriate placement for three years. Ultimately, I was required to retain an educational advocate to secure appropriate services. No family should have to navigate that level of resistance simply to have medically sound evidence acknowledged.

Amendment 1: Restrict Diagnostic Authority to Specialized Medical Experts

Autism Spectrum Disorder—and other neurodevelopmental conditions—are medical diagnoses requiring advanced clinical training and the use of standardized tools such as the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS-2) and the Autism Diagnostic Interview–Revised (ADI-R). To ensure clinical rigor and avoid ambiguity, diagnostic authority under this bill should be limited to licensed developmental pediatricians, clinical psychologists, psychiatrists, and neurologists.

Educational professionals play a vital role in identification and support; however, they are not medically/clinically licensed to render formal medical diagnoses. Clarifying this standard strengthens the bill, ensures reliance on evidence-based assessment, and reduces litigation risk.

Amendment 2: Ensure Equitable Application Across All Disability Categories

While HB 901 focuses on autism, limiting immediate interim recognition to a single diagnosis creates an inequitable, tiered system. Federal law under IDEA and Section 504 mandates equitable Child Find and evaluation procedures for all children with suspected disabilities.

Children with other severe, externally diagnosed conditions—such as traumatic brain injury, epilepsy, major depressive disorder, specific learning disorders, ADHD, or other qualifying disabilities—should not be denied the same interim protections simply because their diagnosis is not autism.

If a parent provides documentation of a comprehensive, independent medical evaluation identifying a federally recognized disability category, the same temporary recognition and

interim support provisions should apply while the school conducts its evaluation. Expanding the scope of this bill ensures:

- Alignment with federal equity mandates under IDEA and Section 504;
- Consistent procedural safeguards across disability categories;
- Reduced risk of disparate treatment claims;
- A more coherent and defensible statutory framework.

This expansion does not alter eligibility standards. Schools would retain full authority to conduct their own evaluations and determine eligibility. The bill would simply ensure that credible, standardized clinical evidence triggers temporary support during the evaluation window.

In sum, House Bill 901, strengthened by these amendments, promotes fairness, clinical integrity, and student safety. It protects children from avoidable harm while preserving school system authority. It reduces adversarial conflict and promotes collaboration between families, medical providers, and educators.

Most importantly, it ensures that children are supported when credible medical evidence demonstrates need—not months later after bureaucratic delay.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report on House Bill 901 with the proposed amendments.

Respectfully submitted,

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