



HB901 - Education - Public School Students - Recognition of External Diagnosis of Autism

Position: Support
Hearing Date: February 25, 2026
Committee: Ways and Means

The Maryland Coalition of Families (MCF) is a statewide nonprofit organization that provides family peer support services at no cost to families who have a child or other loved one with a mental health, substance use, or problem gambling disorder. As experienced caregivers, we provide support, guidance, and hope to people who love or care for someone with a behavioral health challenge and advocate to improve the systems they rely on.

Qualified external providers have the skills and expertise to test, evaluate, and diagnose autism in a child. There must be a pathway for children who receive a diagnosis of autism from a qualified external provider to receive support at school until a school has completed their own evaluation. To allow schools to reject a diagnosis from an external provider in favor of completing their own evaluation delays the implementation of critical services and substitutes the school's opinion for that of a qualified licensed healthcare professional.

MCF polled parents we support who have children with behavioral health challenges and they overwhelmingly support this proposed legislation. One parent shared, "I feel like outside evaluations hold as much if not more weight than school evaluations. As long as there is a preliminary diagnosis used until the school evaluates then the child will be able to receive services sooner than later."

Another parent said, "I support this because my child, who is currently (finally!) in a non-public school to support his autism had to suffer through public school for two years because the IEP team could not accept the diagnosis from an outside doctor. His time in public school was traumatic, and I am not using that word lightly. I mourn all the other children who had their educational experiences ruined by not having this requirement."

School evaluations delay the implementation of critical services. This is completely unnecessary when a diagnosis is provided by a qualified behavioral health professional. Providing support as soon as possible ensures better long-term academic, social, and emotional outcomes for the student.

MCF supports HB901 because it recognizes the importance of early intervention strategies and the validity of the diagnoses from external healthcare professionals.

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