

March 13, 2024

The Honorable Joseph M. McNamara  
Chair, House Committee on Education  
State House  
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of H-7721

Chair McNamara:

My name is *Nathan Seymour* and I am testifying in support of H-7721, a bill that would strengthen parental rights in the IEP process. The way things are currently, an IEP can be changed without parent consent. In addition to this, when changes are made, whether to a student's placement or based on evaluations, the parent doesn't get to review evaluations prior to the meeting or visit the new educational setting.

This bill would:

- Require schools to share evaluation reports and other important documents with parents in advance of IEP meetings;
- Give parents the right to observe placements proposed for their children; and
- Restores the requirement to obtain written parental consent before implementing changes to a student's IEP.

*Like me, my son has ADHD and is on the Autism Spectrum. As someone on the spectrum he experiences delays in social-emotional development, as well as sensory issues, large swings in emotions and intense focus on special interests. This is compounded by ADHD's impairments in attention regulation and working memory, suppressed reward pathways in the brain that result novelty and stimulus seeking and easy boredom, and delays in executive function that impair control of emotional control, impulse regulation and decision making. These issues are most significant early on when the delay can be as much as 30% relative to his peers. My son is a bright, kind, good kid... but he is a child that needs a lot of extra support at this critical stage of his life if he is to be set up for the best success later in his adolescence and early adulthood. That is not what he was given by Glen Hills, the preschool in charge of his education and IEP, and they were enabled to do so by the current ability of schools to act unilaterally in updating a student's IEP as they see fit, when the see fit, with rationale thinner than graphene if they're feeling bold.*

*In March of 2022 the Glen Hills Preschool that my son started attending shortly after I moved to Cranston, who had received his IEP from Cumberland public schools in October and made minor updates in December; announced that they were updating his IEP. My son was dealing with many transitions that would be large and emotionally traumatic even for a neurotypical, non-disabled child; such as the COVID pandemic that had been going on for multiple years at that point, or that he had been moved recently for the third time in his four years of life at that point; much less the divorce I had initiated against his mother and how that situation was proving it would drag on for some time. This is of course, in addition to his existing needs for support. Instead of putting my son first, Glen Hills and my son's IEP team called to update his IEP extremely early, only 4 months after their initial edit, with the intention of implementing the changes ASAP, only a month and a half before the end of the school year when you*

*would expect regression of any progress made to be most likely to occur. They made the insane contradictory argument that he was still having significant behavioral issues in the afternoon, but also that he had made so much progress he didn't need several supports anymore and therefore didn't need to attend preschool full time and could be dropped to half days. They of course insisted he should attend in the morning, not the afternoon where he clearly needed more help. The argument that he made progress in a few months and so no longer needed any support is absurd and tantamount to arguing you can put away your umbrella during a rainstorm because you're dry despite the rain, or that someone with a broken foot doesn't need their crutches any longer because they are walking fine with the use of their crutches. These flimsy pretenses to remove my son from their school during the period of the day he needed more support than they were willing to give him would have been laughable if it were not so absolutely infuriating that that's all they need to do to make whatever changes they want.*

*I am supporting this bill because it could have prevented the experience of my son being railroaded by a preschool motivated more by a desire to remove a student they saw as resource drain than as a child with socio-emotional delays in need of care and attention. They prioritized their comfort over my son's education and developmental supports; as well as knowingly jeopardized my employment despite knowing that I was the only source of stable financial support, access to medical care, and housing; as I still am. They did so on faulty rationale and transparently motivated reasoning to reduce my son's presence at school that I vocally opposed. Behavioral specialists that knew my son at the time agreed with me, and teachers and administrators who have experience with children like my son who learned about this later agreed Glen Hill's IEP members' behavior and rationale was nonsensical if the goal was to help my son. The IEP team and school administration at Glen Hills were not shy about making it clear they only had to inform me of the changes, that my consent was not required, and that they were telling me what they were doing, not asking.*

I urge you to vote in favor of bill H-7721.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to speak in favor of H-7721.