

In support of H7721

Dear Honorable Members of the House Education Committee,

My name is Renee Smith and I am both a parent of a child with an Individualized Education program and also a Chair for the Special Education Local Advisory Committee (LAC) for Coventry and a member of SPEAR. I am in support of bill H7721 to improve the IEP process for families of children with disabilities.

A major tenet of the IEP process is to understand that all parties have an equal part in the process. Currently, in Rhode Island, that is not true. This bill will attempt to further level the field for parents in the IEP process by providing parents with materials required to prepare for the meeting and to become a determining factor in the acceptance if suggested supports. How can a parent be considered an equal part of the process if they do not have the evaluations, IEP draft, and other documents which the rest of the team has access to? This only leads to the parents being caught off guard in the IEP meeting without time to consider the data provided. This bill will add clarity to the IEP process and allow parents to prepare ahead of time, just as the rest of the team has done.

It is also critical that the parent can accept or decline the discussed IEP for their child. The parent knows the child best and can provide important input into the process. Again, this is a team effort so the entire team must agree throughout the process. I understand there will be some parents who do not wish to participate in the process, but the school must provide FAPE, so additional processes will be required, as suggested in the bill.

Finally, I want to address the implementation of such a bill. For the bill to work, RIDE must gather data and ensure school districts follow the laws and inform parents of their rights. I would like to see metrics to ensure that parents are provided documentation several days in advance and provide the options to accept or deny the IEP. I suggest adding questions to the yearly survey, SurveyWorks to gather data if this bill were to pass.

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony.

Renee Smith  
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