

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

Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of H-7721

Dear Chair McNamara:

My name is Sabrina DeRensis 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 parental consent. Additionally, 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
- Restore the requirement to obtain written parental consent before implementing changes to a student's IEP.

I am supporting this bill because as a parent of a 4-year-old son with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), I am his primary advocate and expert on his needs. I must be an equal partner in making decisions about his education. Recently, at his IEP meeting, I was blindsided by changes made without proper notification or sharing of information used to justify those changes, despite my repeated requests for transparency. This disregard for my role as a parent is unacceptable. While I value the expertise of educators, my child's wellbeing and progress hinges on my meaningful involvement from the very start of the decision-making process. Parental voices cannot be silenced or marginalized when it comes to our children's education and futures.

Additionally, nearly 30% of due process complaints filed against school districts cite violations of parental consent and notice requirements (Source: RIPIN Data 2022). Clearly, this is an issue that needs to be addressed through legislation like H-7721.

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.

Sincerely,  
Sabrina DeRensis  
March 12, 2024