

In support of H7721

Dear Honorable Members of the House Education Committee,

My name is Walter Steenbergen and I live in Woonsocket. I am a parent of Charlie, a disabled child with Neurofibromatosis, who had an "Individualized Education Plan" at Beacon Charter. I am testifying today in support of Rep. Kislak's bill H7721 to ensure that parents/caregivers have a meaningful participation in their child's special education. My Representative is Jon Brien.

I could tell you how many times we at SPEAR hear about IEP teams who "decree" the accommodations in an IEP meeting, bring lawyers, refuse to do testing, and generally act without the participation of the parents, despite IDEA language that makes the parent an integral part of the IEP team. Yes, in one of my IEP meetings at Beacon Charter, I was thrown an IEP by the Special Education Director and asked to sign it without even going over it. Only because I know the actual procedures, I certainly didn't sign. I honestly don't think this committee will do anything about this bill. It is appropriate, needed, and in alignment with Federal Law, yet since ARIASE and the superintendents don't support it, and the chairman of this committee refuses to meet with any parents or other stakeholders other than the lobbyists and representatives of RIDE, I am sure this bill will be "held" or killed in committee. Once again, despite evidence, news reports, testimonies from teachers, we will assume that the professionals who oversee this system will adhere to the law. Most do, and this bill is not for them. This bill is for the disabled children and actually allows parents and caregivers to have their federally mandated right to participate at least given a shot. Somehow, however, the special interest groups and RIDE are much more important to this committee, the governor, and the Speaker. It's the Consent Decree all over again. In the unlikely event any of you want to meet with me or our group, my contact info is below.

Thank you for your attention! Walt Steenbergen walt@cwgmarketing.com 401-356-0791