

PLEASE NOTE: Legislative Information **cannot** perform research, provide legal advice, or interpret Maine law. For legal assistance, please contact a qualified attorney.

An Act To Provide Parents of Children with Disabilities Access to Ombudsman Services

Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:

Sec. 1. 20-A MRSA c. 303, sub-c. 4 is enacted to read:

SUBCHAPTER 4

OMBUDSMAN PROGRAM

§ 7351. Ombudsman program

1. Definitions. As used in this section, unless the context otherwise indicates, the following terms have the following meanings.

A. "Ombudsman" means the director of the program and persons employed or volunteering to perform the work of the program.

B. "Program" means the ombudsman program established under this section.

2. Program established. The ombudsman program is established as an independent program within the Executive Department to provide ombudsman services to the children and families in the State regarding special education programs and special education services and to provide support to students with disabilities and their parents, guardians and educators.

3. Services. The program shall provide services directly or under contract. The program shall:

A. Provide information to help families and educators understand state and federal laws, rules and regulations regarding special education services and to access training and support, technical information services and mediation services as appropriate;

B. Act as a liaison between parents and school administrative units; and

C. Help parties to a dispute explore options for resolving conflicts.

4. Report. The ombudsman shall report to the Governor, the department and the Legislature before January 1st each year on the activities and services of the program and recommendations for changes in policy, rule or law to improve the provision of services.

5. Oversight. The joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over education matters shall review the operations of the program and may make recommendations to the Governor regarding the services under this section. The joint standing committee may submit legislation that it determines necessary to implement this section.

SUMMARY

This bill creates an ombudsman program to provide services to children and families in the State regarding special education programs and special education services and to provide support to students with disabilities and their parents, guardians and educators.