

MEMORIAL MIDDLE SCHOOL

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Sarah Connors
Humanities Gr 6
SPTA, President

RE: L.D. 552

To: Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee

I am writing this letter to encourage you to vote against the passage of L.D. 552, *An Act To Strengthen the Individualized Education Program Process*. As a twenty-year regular education teacher in a district with over 500 students IEP's, I have spent more than enough time in these meetings to know that most communities work and plan appropriate services with the student's best interests as the sole factor when planning services. As the president of our local union, South Portland Teachers Association, I worry about regular education and special education teachers. Special education teachers are often the most diligent working teachers in any district; with the proposed bill, one inadvertent effect may be that teachers do not accept special education positions. By doing so, they are more liable to end up in due process hearings and mediation. As these positions are often difficult to staff, adding another risk for these teachers doesn't bode well for our students. A second impact may be that regular education teachers, ed technicians, and special education teachers may be required to participate in expensive and time-consuming due process hearings.

As a regular education teacher, I have had many students with IEP's in my classroom. As part of my role, I have seen the relief and support an IEP change can bring to students in my classroom. As a team member, I have been able to advocate for changes in the IEP to give

students what they needed in real-time. According to their timeline, the ability to respond to a child's needs is invaluable to student experiences in the school setting. Experiencing success should not be underestimated, as many students in special education need opportunities that allow flexibility in their evolving needs, thus reflected in a fluid IEP. This bill would essentially remove that flexible timeline and keep students in situations where their learning suffers and impacts their future success in school. I imagine how disheartened a student could become knowing they aren't successful in school. The necessary changes a teacher recommends based on a professional perspective aren't enough to get what they need.

This bill will place more barriers for some students who may not have parents, and guardians who may be challenging to engage with the IEP process, and those in foster care. These students would suffer the most from this bill. Many of my students and families do not speak English as a first language. I find it mindboggling that we would place more barriers to accessing their education with this bill. Our challenge is to remove barriers for every student, regardless of their needs, language, or family background; this bill would put roadblocks into what can be a positive relationship through the IEP process. Would I be considered a good teacher in regular education if my every decision required a group of ten people to agree? Wouldn't I be a neglectful teacher by not acting responsively to their needs and learning? Why are the rules different for a different population? Inequality, as I am teaching my students, is never the answer.

Finally, I urge you not to enact a bill aiming to fix some districts' issues by applying a restrictive law that punishes all students on IEP's. Our students need their educators to be flexible and responsive to their ever-changing needs especially given the stressors on our communities and students with the ongoing pandemic. Our teachers are working feverishly to close the gap left by the pandemic, our time is precious, and our work is essential. Please don't make us tie up our time with IEP's, increasing the day for all teachers and adding more time constraints on our work. Our students need us to be ready to serve them with a timely

and intact process, one that recognizes that students come with their barriers, and our job is to help remove them so they can learn.

Thank you for your time,

Sarah Connors

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