

HB 715 – Public Schools – Self-Contained Special Education Classrooms – Use of Video Recording Devices

Hearing Date: February 10, 2021

Dear Members of the Ways and Means Committee:

I am writing to you in hopes of your support for House Bill 1292- Public Schools- Special Education Classrooms-Use of Video Recording Devices. As a parent of a student who attends public school in Prince George's County. I am supportive of the protections this bill will offer our special needs students who are educated in Maryland public schools and our special education staff.

My son, Montgomery, is educated in a community reference instruction (CRI) program at Kettering Middle School where he receives 90% of his education in a self- contained classroom. He and has classmates participate in Art, Music and Physical Education with their general education classmates. We are fortunate that the special education staff at Kettering Middle school are seasoned educators and are well-trained in educating and managing students with special needs.

However, incidents can occur where staff and students are at risk in these classrooms due to behavioral needs and often lack of staff training and resources. We had a terrible experience at Bradbury Heights Elementary school. Monty's 5th grade teacher accused him of inappropriate behavior. It was the teacher's word against Monty's. Monty has verbal expression delays and was unable to communicate what was happening or defend himself. My husband and I are Monty's voice.

If the classroom area had surveillance coverage, we could have access to a documented recording of what actually occurred and allow all parties to have a shared picture of the event. Instead, we hired a parent advocate to observe the classroom, we interviewed Monty's caregivers and community service providers to determine what actually occurred. Fortunately, as a result of the observation and interviews, we were able to determine what triggered his behavior and understood how and why he was behaving towards his teacher and classmates. We removed Monty from the classroom and the alleged "behavior" ceased. However, we will never know what actually happened in the classroom.

As parents, we entrust the school staff with our most vulnerable children every day. Being able to collaborate and have transparency will enable us all to work together in a concerted effort for the betterment of our children. Please support HB 715.

Sincerely,

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