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House Bill 0715/ SB665 Public Schools- Self-Contained Special Education Classrooms-Use of Video Recording Devices

Position: Support with Amendments

Ways and Means Committee

2/10/2021

I am the mother of a non-verbal child with significant cognitive disabilities who receives the majority of her education in a self-contained classroom in an adaptive life skill program. I am in support of this bill to ensure camera surveillance occurs in self-contained special education classrooms as the incidence of abuse to our most vulnerable students and staff often goes without mitigation. Although this bill requires report of an event to administration or to the district, the camera footage can give real time information about what was happening in the classroom before, during and after an incident.

Proposed amendments to the bill add language "upon request" by parent/staff or administrator of which I am in favor.

Incidents often occur in these classrooms in schools due to the manifestations of student disabilities, lack of explicit safety training for the staff, lack of staff training/professional development regarding behavior management and de-escalation, and limited staff resources. Cameras will only be placed in self contained classrooms upon request and will remain for the duration of the school year.

In order to meet the criteria for the "alternative education program", students must also meet the criteria for significant cognitive disabilities. Please refer to MSDE information on eligibility of significant cognitive disabilities at <http://marylandpublicschools.org/programs/Documents/Special-Ed/TAB/19-07%20Alternate%20Educational%20Framework%20TAB%20Final%20-%20508.docx>

Per ESSA, the number of students who may take the alternate assessment is limited to no more than 1.0% of the total number of students in the State are assessed in ELL, Math or Science. This negates the concern that students may be placed in these classrooms just for safety/video surveillance requests.

Students in these classrooms are the most vulnerable, powerless, student constituents in our schools and are unable to tell parents and caregivers what has occurred in their classrooms. There is a high incidence of events in student on student attacks as well as staff on student abuse and student to staff injuries.

House Bill 715 will provide protections for both students and staff and provide evidence in camera surveillance needed to assist local CPS/authorities, administration and investigators when an incident has been reported. Please support this bill to ensure protections for our most vulnerable students and staff.

Respectfully Submitted - Lori Scott