



**Maryland Developmental
Disabilities Council**

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Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

SB 577: Public Schools – Self-Contained Special Education Classroom – Use of Video Recording Devices

February 16, 2022

Letter of Information

The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council (DD Council) envisions a state where people with and without disabilities live, learn, work, and play together. This includes children with disabilities learning alongside their peers without disabilities. Maryland educates more than 112,000 students with disabilities with a variety of services and supports - most in general education classrooms.

This bill would require a local school system to install at least one video recording device in every self-contained special education classroom in Maryland.

The Council is not taking a position on this bill, but would like to provide information on the potential impacts and realities. It is important to note that some families have expressed the desire for cameras to be installed in their child's classroom. Most of the concern comes from families of children, who because of age, trauma, or disability, cannot verbally communicate what has happened at school. Some families express that when their children come home with an unexplained injury, they have limited options to obtain additional information on the event that may have caused that injury, and that cameras afford them a tool to address it.

On the other hand, a number of important questions remain from the requirements outlined in SB 577.

- Are video recording devices a wise use of limited resources?
- Is anyone made safer in the presence of a camera?
- Will this lead to further segregation of students with developmental disabilities? Will less students with disabilities, especially those with the most significant disabilities, be educated alongside their peers without disabilities?

The Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates (or COPAA), an entity that seeks to protect and enforce the legal and civil rights of students with disabilities and their families, published an extensive review in March 2021 of the legislative idea to bring cameras into classrooms. This paper raises a number of important considerations. Here are a few:

- This policy decision is costly and would present the potential for disparate outcomes among school districts that are unable to effectively implement the camera system due to limited resources.
- Without constant surveillance of the footage, the installation of cameras could provide little more than a false sense of security.
- The placement of cameras in special education classrooms may violate the intention of providing the least restrictive environment for students.

There is limited data about requests for video footage, as well as the specific need to install cameras. Because the research into this issue is either minimal or shows that cameras have little to no impact, a limited pilot program of a demographically representative number of schools in the State could yield the information and data necessary to determine the need for statewide implementation.

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