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House Bill 226/SB0577 Public Schools – Self-Contained Special Education Classroom – Use of Video Recording Devices
Position: Support
Ways and Means Committee 2/3/22 - Hearing 2/16/22

I am the grandmother of a nonverbal child with level 2 autism who receives his education in a self-contained classroom in Anne Arundel County. I am in support of this bill to allow cameras in self-contained classrooms in MD to give a voice to him as well as others who cannot come home and tell how their day was, as well as teachers who may be accused of harming kids behind these closed doors. I ask you to put yourself in the shoes of the parents who have no idea what is happening to their child during the school day. How would you feel if you sent your child out the door for the day and could not discuss with them how their day went? When my grandson comes home sounding hoarse, I want to know if he's been crying all day. When he comes home and starts hitting his behind, I want to know if he was spanked that day. Can you imagine the frustration these poor children must feel not being able to express their feelings? I ask you to go 24 hours without talking or writing anything and try to let your family members know what you need, what you're thinking and how your day was, I bet you would be very upset and frustrated by hour two. I know these children can be demanding and that is why we must have the absolute best of the best as far as teachers and aides for them. The camera footage can give real time information to administrators and Central Office staff when a complaint or allegation is voiced. This video, by law, will only be used to investigate allegations of harm, abuse or neglect to students and vindicate or convict staff of crimes of abuse or harm to nonverbal students. If I were a teacher, I would welcome this video, what would be the benefit of not having it available? Store owners have cameras to protect their property, home owners have ring doorbells and cameras to protect their homes, schools do have cameras too in hallways etc. why aren't there cameras in these classrooms?

Parents need to feel comfortable knowing that these kids will be looked after with love, acceptance and compassion. We need to feel good about who is watching our kids during the day. It is very hard to trust when you hear such horror stories of abuse and this would be one way to start building that trust. I don't feel that restraints should EVER be used! If you feel that a child should be restrained, call the parents to come get them, it doesn't make them feel safe and it causes physiological harm to these kids. Would you like to be restrained because you are having a hard time expressing yourself? I hope that I received correct information when I was told that by law, restraints cannot be used in the Maryland school system.

We have recently seen horrific incidents in Baltimore, Frederick County and other counties in MD where special needs students have been harmed over and over again in these classrooms

with no accountability from the district and in some instances allowing abusers to move from one school to another without termination.

I am happy to hear that the ARC Central Chesapeake Region has gotten involved with the school system and that is a good and positive thing. The more resources, eyes and ears we have looking out for our children, the better.

Please support HB226/SB0577 to allow cameras in self-contained classrooms in MD to ensure protections for our most vulnerable students and staff. We need to do better for these students, we owe it to them.

Sincerely,
Kathy Mullen