



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

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Testimony Re: Senate Bill 180 An Act Relating to Education -- Children with Disabilities

Senate Education Committee

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Madam Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its strong support for Senate Bill 180 and thank Senator DiMario for sponsoring and Senators Euer, Murray, and Valverde for co-sponsoring. This bill would require parental consent before an initial evaluation is made, a student is placed in a special education program, or any IEP services or placement changes are made. The bill also extends special education services to individuals until the age of twenty-two and removes an outdated and derogatory term about individuals with special needs.

The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*, a federal law passed in 1990, ensured that all children with disabilities have access to special education services. The law also acknowledges the critical role parents play in supporting the needs of their children and lists them as an essential component of their child's development. Several states, including Massachusetts, have adopted similar legislation to include parents in the decision-making process of their children's education needs.

Parents and caregivers represent the best interest of their children and are often their best advocates. Therefore, they should have a voice in developing their child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or other educational programs and services before implementation. Parents provide vital information that only they would know about their child's behaviors, strengths, weaknesses, and personality, which can better inform the IEP process and educational support. Creating programs and services in partnership with parents supports the child's educational outcomes.

This law would require written parental consent before changes can be made to an IEP and allow schools to seek mediation or due process, require schools to send evaluations and other documents to parents at least seven days before an IEP meeting, and give parents the right to observe any proposed program or placement for their child.

Parents might not be experts on special education, but they are experts on their children, and this bill recognizes their important role.

Thank you for the leadership the General Assembly has shown on the issue and the opportunity to testify today.

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