

Association of RI Administrators of Special Education: In opposition to H 7612

Sent via email to houseeducation@rilegislature.gov

April 3, 2024

Rep. Joseph McNamara, Chairman
House Education Committee
Rhode Island General Assembly
73 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Chairman McNamara,

I write as legal counsel for the Association of Rhode Island Administrators of Special Education (“ARIASE”) to submit this written testimony in opposition to H 7612. ARIASE is the lone statewide association of special education administrators in Rhode Island, and its members are passionately committed to serving students with disabilities and working collaboratively and constructively with their families to enhance their educational opportunities and outcomes.

The members of ARIASE support the spirit of H 7612 and the achieving a better life experience (ABLE) account program, but disagree that an annual IEP meeting is the ideal setting for promoting ABLE’s benefits. IEP team members are not financial advisors – their sole focus in an annual IEP meeting is on the student for whom the meeting has been convened. Team members, including parents, are focused on reviewing and discussing relevant student data, progress toward goals, and what changes may be incorporated into an updated IEP to ensure continued progress and access to a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. ARIASE members are very protective of that process and of that very focused time spent together with students and parents.

Respectfully, ARIASE leaders submit that there are better vehicles for disseminating information about ABLE accounts. For example, last year the General Assembly passed RIGL § 16-24-19 to bolster the local advisory committees (“LAC”) in each public school district and charter public school. The LACs are composed entirely of persons involved in or concerned with the education of students with disabilities, and one of their primary purposes is to share relevant information with parents of students with disabilities. LACs are designed to deal with larger topics and shared issues concerning students with disabilities. IEP meetings require a laser focus on one student’s educational progress, challenges and opportunities for growth. The LACs would seem to be better suited to increasing awareness of ABLE among families of students with disabilities in Rhode Island more broadly.

In closing, we appreciate Representative Cortvriend’s commitment to the ABLE program, but as an organization made up of special education administrators, ARIASE respectfully disagrees that IEP annual review meetings are the appropriate means of promoting ABLE’s benefits. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Timothy J. Groves, Esq.