

March 3, 2011

Education Committee

State of Connecticut General Assembly

Re: House Bill 6501

Dear Education Committee Member:

My name is Merva Jackson and I am the Executive Director of African Caribbean American Parents of Children with Disabilities. AFCAMP is a family organization in the state of Connecticut that provides education, advocacy and support to parents raising children with disabilities for the purpose of improving their children's education and quality of life.

I am writing to ask for your support of House Bill 6501 that has been proposed to stop unnecessary delays in providing special education services to eligible children with learning disabilities.

Our state has a duty to identify children requiring special education services under the "Child Find" mandate, section 612(a)(3) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. However, this duty has been thwarted by the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) *2010 Guidelines for Identifying a Child with a Specific Learning Disability* designation of using Scientifically Based Research Interventions (SRBI) (a system of incrementally increased supports) *prior* to a child being identified as eligible to receive special education. Following the SRBI program may require that a child wait up to 40 weeks (an entire school year) before the child even begins to receive appropriate special education services.

I can tell you first-hand that time and again, children with learning disabilities are being forced to wait to receive necessary services from schools, because these schools are using the SRBI program and interventions.

I call your attention to serious concerns, from both state and federal entities, about the use of SRBI in unfortunately delaying special education eligibility. In response to hearing of delays, the *Connecticut State Advisory Council on Special Education's 2010 Annual Report* recommended that the CSDE "clearly articulate how SRBI is supposed to interface with special education, specifically relating to students requiring referral to special education. The Connecticut State Department of Education's *2011 Annual Performance Report* states (1) use of SRBI is "a very difficult, time consuming, and complex process to implement," (2) "caused confusion for districts in understanding when to provide interventions, for how

long, and when a referral for special education evaluation is warranted, often blurring the lines between the general education classroom interventions and special education services,” and (3) resulted in “more districts were identified to have inappropriate identification practices in the area of a learning disability than in previous years.” At the federal level, the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services warned in a January 21, 2011 memo that SRBI must not be used to “delay or deny a timely initial evaluation for children suspected of having a learning disability.”

While we wholeheartedly support House Bill 6501, we respectfully recommend that it is amended to reference that the SRBI process should not interfere with the prompt evaluation of child with a suspected learning disability.

Thank you for your consideration. I would be honored to speak with you or your legislative aides regarding any questions.

Very Truly Yours,

Merva Jackson

Executive Director

African Caribbean American Parents of Children with Disabilities