



60-B Weston Street Hartford CT, 06120

February 28, 2011

Good Afternoon members of the Education Committee and Chairs Fleischmann and Stillman:

My Name is Sheila Harris and I am the Family Support School Coordinator for 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'm here to testify in support of of **S.B. 1038 An Act Concerning Individualized Education Programs** and **H.B. 6432 An Act Closing the Achievement Gap**.

I've worked supporting families in Hartford and the Greater Hartford school districts for the past seven years. I also get the opportunity to speak to many parents from across the state who contacts our office daily for assistance with concerns regarding their children's IEPs and use of seclusion and restraint. I can tell you that this is an alarm bell for families and school districts across our state especially in urban and poor communities.

I talk to parents of children with mental health issues who are being suspended, restrained, and arrested at school as a result of outbursts related to their disabilities and disorders. These children don't have mandated Behavioral Intervention Plans as required under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. When I meet with parents and review their child's educational records, I'm shocked to see that often times the student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) does not include many of the recommendations that the school's own evaluators and personnel have recommended. I often go to school Planning and Placement Team Meetings with parents just to figure out what is happening and where is the disconnect. I work with parents who sometimes do not know their child has a disability or disorder or they have trouble recognizing signs and symptoms impacting their child's behavior. Then we go into a school meeting and the school personnel have not even read the student's evaluations or reports, much less have the necessary information to develop and implement an appropriate IEP.

I am not a trained educator, nor am I a psychologist but through my work and training with AFCAMP, I've gained the knowledge necessary to help parents and work with school personnel to ensure that students have appropriate IEPs. Through our Community Parent Resource Center, I work closely with service providers and the local schools who have stepped up to the plate to work with our parent group to ensure that students with disabilities have access to the services necessary to achieve academic success and quality of life.

I ask that you pay close attention to this issue and ensure that the appropriate measures are taken to improve this matter and improve our achievement gap. Thank you for your time and attention today.

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