

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Dawn Metcalf and I am a parent of a special needs student in northern Connecticut. This letter is to express my strong opposition to HB:5552; An Act Concerning Special Education. This bill misplaces its good intentions to create an unnecessary burden onto the very families the state hopes to support and those children who need speedy and effective resolution to their challenges concerning special education.

To require parties to participate in an adjudication conducted by an impartial third-party adjudicator before conducting a special education hearing is already an opportunity made available through mediation when a complaint is filed with the state, but unfortunately, there are districts, administrations and situations where mediation and complaints are not adequate to address a time-sensitive or extreme situation that can negatively effect a special needs student. Adding another time-consuming and potentially costly barrier to resolving these issues does not serve the student, who should be the top priority in such disputes. HB:5552 thus unfairly and unwisely delays access to appropriate actions, interventions and services for a special needs child and puts yet more stress and demands on special needs parents to shoulder the burden while school administrators have the resources, legal aid and supports built into their makeup. Unfortunately, with this unequal playing field, it is the families' only resource to look to appropriate channels of communication, filing complaints, requesting mediation and finally, considering due process. Adding a level of independent arbitration further distances the possibility of issues being resolved quickly and often these people have previous ties in the community, the school system or the administration due to the small circles of special education-related individuals in each state. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to find truly "independent" arbitrators who do not have prior experiences with the parties involved. For all of these reasons, but most of all in the interest of the special needs students getting their challenges with the school administrations met, I strongly oppose HB:5552 and would encourage all those considering it to reject this bill.

Thank you for your time and kind consideration.

Sincerely,

Dawn Metcalf