

Testimony of SEEK-CT
Before Committee on Education on R.B. 7312
March 13, 2019

Chairman Sanchez, Chairman McCrory and members of the Committee,

I am here today representing Special Education Equity for Kids in Connecticut (SEEK-CT), Connecticut's first organization of parents, providers, advocates and attorneys fighting for excellent education for the 70,000 Connecticut students with disabilities. We have found that teachers, administrators and academics have been invited to sit at the decision-making table when crucial questions of special education are decided; but parents and advocates for students with disabilities have been left without a seat. SEEK-CT seeks to remedy that oversight.

The Committee has in front of it Raised Bill No. 7312 which creates a task force to study issues relating to parental involvement with students. Astonishingly, the seven-member task force has no seat for a parent. Indeed, there are two teacher union representatives, four members from school administration or management, and one PTA representative, who could be a parent or could be another teacher. There are parent groups throughout the state, and particularly parents' groups dealing with special education, as well as parents' groups representing children of color and Hispanic children. A parent involvement task force without parents is an absurdity.

The task force is supposed to study issues of parental involvement. One area in which parental involvement is inappropriately limited is in the area of observations of their children in school, both by parents and by their educational experts. Many Connecticut school districts drastically limit observations, leaving parents ignorant of what goes on in school and, at times, suspicious of what school officials tell them. Massachusetts has dealt with this directly by passing a law in 2008 guaranteeing the right of parents to observe their children in the classroom. We urge Connecticut to follow suit.

Whether a task force on parental involvement is the best use of the state's limited educational resources at this time is a question the Committee will have to judge. But, if such a task force is set up, at least half of the task force needs to be made up of parents.