

STATEMENT OF ADVOCATES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES ON HB 2170

SFA #2

We, the undersigned, submit this testimony from our perspective as advocates for Illinois students with disabilities. We represent children in every geographic region and demographic group, including rural students, urban students, students of color, English learners, and students from under-resourced homes and communities. HB 2170 is a strong, albeit imperfect, bill, and we support its passage.

Several elements of the bill are particularly beneficial to all students and especially to our students with disabilities:

- The Early Intervention (EI) extension is welcome music to our ears. Right now, EI terminates on a child's third birthday. If the child still needs support but that third birthday falls late in the school year or during the summer, waiting for the new school year to begin means that a critical window for services is lost. HB 2170 guarantees that our young children will continue to receive EI support until the school year begins.
- The recommendations to expand and diversify the Early Childhood pool of educators as well as the general pool of qualified teachers certainly merit our endorsement.
- The requirements that public universities submit their admissions criteria to the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) for a centralized database and that high schools ensure students access to classes that will fulfill those criteria are also worthwhile proposals. Too often our students with disabilities are discouraged from enrolling in classes where they could be successful with accommodations, and too often these students are not even informed about the steps necessary to be successful during college admissions.

As we review Amendment 2, we would like to raise two main concerns:

- Article 5 of Amendment requires a kindergarten readiness assessment. We support the idea behind obtaining this benchmark information for incoming kindergarteners as a means for preparing appropriate pedagogy. However, English Learners have historically been mischaracterized by similar assessments, and the bill provides no guidance on how to ensure that EL learners are appropriately assessed. The term "assessment" itself is also problematic. In Illinois, parents/guardians must consent to any assessments administered to their children. Perhaps the kindergarten readiness tool should be relabeled as a screening to better reflect its universal application and purpose.
- The section on literacy and dyslexia has been completely eliminated. Although we had been prepared to offer suggestions for improving that section, we were thrilled to see the topic addressed. The deletion of this section is unfortunate. We hope we will have the opportunity to collaborate with Leader Lightford, the Black Caucus and the General Assembly on drafting literacy legislation as a separate bill.

As we stated in the introduction to our testimony, we support SB 2170. We are grateful to the many individuals and organizations who think daily about increased access and equity for all of our students, and we look forward to future collaboration.

For additional information, please contact Barbara Cohen, bcohen@legalcouncil.org, 773-504-3248.

Sincerely,

Barb Cohen, Legal Council for Health Justice

Beverley H. Johns, President, Learning Disabilities Association of Illinois

Penny Richards, LDA of IL Board Director

Chris Yun, Access Living

Julieta Rosales Pasko, NCSP, School Psychologist, LDAI Vice-Pres. & Diversity Chair