



SHEENA WASHINGTON'S TESTIMONY BEFORE MARYLAND HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE IN SUPPORT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION BILL HB1058

March 17, 2016

Good Afternoon. My name is Sheena Washington and I'm a High School History teacher and case manager from Prince George's County. I've been teaching for 6 years with a Masters degree in Leadership in Teaching and certification in Elementary Education, History, and Special Education. I thank you for this opportunity to speak in support of HB 1058 which has the potential to improve learning opportunities for students with disabilities while attracting and retaining highly qualified special educators.

Special Educators fulfill two distinct jobs as case managers and as specialized instructors with the same amount of planning time for these dual roles. The overwhelming amount of time required to complete legal paperwork diminishes the amount of time that we have to provide supports in the classroom with less specialized instruction for students with disabilities.

This model of dual responsibilities without adequate time contributes to an exacerbated achievement gap among students with disabilities. ***94% of Maryland Special educators surveyed by MSEA, said that they either are not given additional planning time devoted to case management work, or if they are, it's not enough to cover their responsibilities.*** I am here today to ask the honorable committee members to consider the detrimental impact that the ever growing workload placed on special educators has on student learning as the amount of time required for paperwork compliance interferes with the delivery of services to our students.

I am here because so many of my colleagues leave the field of special education each year due to the overwhelming pressure of compliance as paperwork becomes a priority before teaching.

A recent NPR article notes that 49 out of 50 states report shortages of special education teachers while special educators leave the profession at nearly twice the rate that general educators leave. 12.3%. This high attrition rate requires districts within our state to engage in constant and costly recruitment efforts. <http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2015/11/09/436588372/behind-the-shortage-of-special-ed-teachers-long-hours-crushing-paperwork>

We need staffing models, supports, and best practices across all schools in Maryland so that educators can meet the instructional needs of our students. I love teaching and designing lessons to engage student learning. Yet again, differentiated instructional planning requires time.

I am here to share the sentiments felt by Special Educators across the nation and in our great state of Maryland, who spend HOURS completing, printing, correcting, and updating time consuming IEP's. Educators who assess, schedule, and coordinate services all while teaching full time.

Special educators are tasked to choose everyday between spending time on paperwork & compliance OR spending time on collaborating & planning lessons for student learning. I'm asking this committee to remedy this tragic dilemma by authorizing a Special Education workload taskforce. Compliance OR students? What is more important to the members of the committee? If we are ever to address the growing achievement gap for students with disabilities, we must address the impact of workload. I am here today asking for the creation of a State Task force to address these workload concerns which will address teacher retention, so that we can best serve our most important stakeholders, our students.