



Serving persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities since 1967

President, Board of Directors, Ronald P. Cheli, Esq.

Executive Director, Thomas F. Kendziorski, Esq.

November 29, 2012

Governor Rick Snyder
P.O. Box #30013
Lansing, MI 48909

Dear Governor Snyder:

The Arc of Oakland County is a non-profit charitable advocacy organization. We are one of the largest local chapters of a state and national association of parents and others who support children and adults experiencing intellectual and developmental disabilities. On behalf of my board of directors, and our 1,000 dues-paying member households, I urge you to oppose Senate Bill 1358 [HB 6004] (“State Education Achievement Authority”), House Bill 5923 (“Expanded Charter Schools”), and Senate Bill 620 (“Parent Trigger”).

We respectfully ask you to oppose a plan that would create a single, statewide “super” school district, the Education Achievement Authority (EAA), which is only accountable to an independent board appointed by the Governor’s office. If such a plan were to pass, this new “district” would be allowed to open schools in our county without any approval from a local school board, the Michigan Department of Education, or the legislature itself. Proponents of the plan indicate that their only intention is to set up such a district to help students in failing schools. While we agree that helping all students (including those with disabilities) and addressing the issues facing our state's schools must be a priority, this plan goes way beyond the problems of persistently low-achieving schools. In fact, this plan may not limit the new district to only failing schools.

SB1358 confers upon this new "super district" the ability to seize any school located within the state. Michigan's education system does not need this and yet another level of administrative bureaucracy. The plan also allows the EAA to force the lease or sale of property owned by the taxpayers of Oakland County school districts into this new statewide district! On the academic side of things, there are no quality measures or requirements woven into this legislation. While the instructional methods being used in the EAA may sound promising, there is no data to reliably judge whether it is successful enough to make the program statewide in scope.

We have grave concerns that this plan allows for these new EAA schools to purposefully select only those students it wishes to enroll into a particular student body. How does this enhance diversity of thought and academic creativity? What happens to the students who are non-selected for access? Public education, paid for by the taxpayer, should be for all of our state's children and it must not discriminate. The Arc has worked so very hard over the past few generations to obtain for

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all children with special needs the basic right to attend school ... it was not that way prior to the early 1970's. The Arc does not advocate for "disability-only" specialty school programs (see: HB 5923). The days of segregation should be relegated to that of ancient history.

SB620 allows parents to "take over" a failing school and to contract with any for-profit education management organization (EMO) to run the facility. The Arc of Oakland believes that public funding should serve as an investment in our children, not as profit for a corporation's shareholders.

"Parent empowerment" and "school of choice" are ubiquitous phrases that are being incorrectly employed to persuade people into thinking that we are not already using best practices to educate our children. The truth is that many of the things that appear in the literature as cutting-edge are already underway in our schools, but are also monitored with accountability, transparency, and authenticity. Any legislation of such far-reaching magnitude must be studied, considered and discussed at length by and with diverse stakeholder input.

Once again, The Arc of Oakland County respectfully requests that you oppose Senate Bills 1358 and 620, as well as House Bill 5923. We leave you with three final points:

- The Education Achievement Authority has been operating for only two to three months. This is not enough time to draw any concrete conclusions on the effectiveness of this action for students in general or special education.
- There has not been enough time to sort out the unintended consequences especially for students with a disability. We need to be able to determine how students with disabilities will fare in the EAA.
- We ask that you wait until there is sufficient data from the EAA that is currently operating in the Detroit area, and follow closely how students with disabilities fare in the EAA, before expanding the EAA to include additional schools across the state.

I thank you in advance for your consideration and attention to this most important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom F. Kendziorski". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "T" and "K".

Thomas F. Kendziorski
Executive Director
Attorney at Law