



INDIANA COMMUNITY ACTION POVERTY INSTITUTE

Research and Public Policy

Testimony before the Senate Committee on Pensions and Labor SB 409 Employee Absence for certain meetings

Erin Macey, Director, Indiana Community Action Poverty Institute
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In lieu of the written testimony crafted for the hearing, Erin shared the following from a parent who planned to testify but could not attend:

My name is Heather Law and I am the Executive Director of Scott County Partnership. I have been employed at this non-profit organization for 8 years. For more than 18 years, my husband, Jesse, has been employed by a Fortune 500 Company that has been headquartered in Indiana for 100+ years and employs more than 10,000 Hoosiers. We are the typical hardworking Hoosier family.

Beyond our professional lives, we are the proud parents of Owen, a 12-year-old 6th grader, and Ruby a 9-year-old 3rd grader. Both of our children have Individualized Education Plans or IEPs. Owen qualifies under the eligibility area of Autism Spectrum Disorder and Ruby Other Health Impairment.

My children attend a small, rural school that works very hard to meet their unique needs as outlined in their IEPs. As a previous educator, I work cooperatively with my children's school to ensure their IEPs are followed. I communicate often with my children's IEP teams. I am involved, some might even say overly involved. I am allowed to be so involved in my children's education because I am employed by an amazing organization that fosters a culture of family first and flexibility. We understand that staff are better employees when they are allowed to take care of themselves and those they love.

On the flip side, Jesse, who works for a major corporation, has not been able to attend our children's Case Conference Committee meetings because of his employer's rigidity and lack of flexibility. Not only does his absence at CCC meetings place a burden on me to make education decisions but he should also have an equal voice in our children's education futures. Currently, no employment protection permits him to attend these meetings. Our story is not unique. Hoosier families across the state are faced with the same choice dilemma. Do they choose to attend their child's CCC meeting and face recourse from their employer and possible loss of employment? Or choose to not attend their child's CCC meeting jeopardizing the child's future. Parents know their children's needs best. Parents need to be advocates and the voice for their children. Parents need to be allowed to be active members of their child's IEP team and attend their child's CCC meeting without fear of employer repercussions. On behalf of my fellow IEP-receiving Hoosier families, I ask that you please support Senate Bill 409.

Good morning Senator Rogers and Members of the Committee



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As a former teacher, a parent, and an advocate for Hoosier families, I am pleased to support SB 409. From the first prenatal visit to the day they fly the nest, our children require our energy and attention. So too, does work. Increasingly, children have working parents, and this sometimes sets up a tension between engagement in a child's schooling and performance on the job. In 2023, 67 percent of two-parent families with children had both parents employed, while in single parent families that percentage is 76% for mothers and 87% for father-led households. We also have roughly 56,000 grandparents raising grandchildren in Indiana, at least some of whom are also working – and this may be a population to consider including as this bill develops.

Having participated in and observed quite a number of case conferences during my time in education and in school evaluation, I can tell you that having a parent present changes the dynamic. Teachers don't have to question or assume what works or doesn't, what is happening at home or isn't – and the parent-school team comes up with better plans and solutions to challenges a student may be facing. In one particularly powerful example that I can recall when I was observing case conferences for a school evaluation, school staff were speculating about the reasons a particular student was struggling. When dad arrived and talked about the strategies he was trying and what he was observing, the conversation shifted completely and the team started looking at other possibilities like dyslexia.

A number of states, both red and blue, have provisions in place to support parents' engagement in their children's schools – and I'm so pleased that my home state of Indiana is joining them. While I'm certain that most employers recognize that their employees have obligations to their families and sometimes need flexibility, this bill codifies that expectation and our collective commitment to supporting some of our most vulnerable students. We appreciate this step forward and hope that we can continue to work on strategies that allow parents to be their best at work and at home.