



INDIANA COMMUNITY ACTION POVERTY INSTITUTE

Research and Public Policy

Testimony before the House Committee on Employment, Labor and Pensions

SB 409 Employee Absence for Certain Meetings

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Good morning Representative VanNatter and Members of the Committee,

I am a Community Needs Analyst at the Indiana Community Action Poverty Institute, and a daughter to an educator who specializes in teaching Autistic children. I am here in support of SB 409. As I testify today I am thinking of my 3-year-old daughter who will most likely need an IEP once she starts school. I cannot help but think about the level of consideration that goes into me meeting with therapist to determine what treatment plan is best for her. These are not hasty decisions, as I often need to be educated about terminology and treatment options. I cannot imagine someone who doesn't know my child like I do making these decisions without me because my employer will not allow me the time to do so. As she gets older I know that these decisions will have even bigger consequences. My mother often talks to me about how she explains IEP's to her parents and that they must attend multiple meetings as they are making life changing decisions for their child's future. Sometimes this involved a transitional plan that will determine if the child will graduate high school with a diploma, work towards employment, or need independent living accommodations post high school. These are decisions that parents should be around to understand, ask questions about, and with knowledge learned from the child's education team, consent with a clear mind where they aren't worried about how the time they are taking off work will impact them.

The four educators I heard from, which I will share their full testimony with you by email, all attest to the change in the dynamics of an IEP meeting when a parent is there to advocate for their child's future; teachers don't have to question or assume what works or



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doesn't, what is happening at home or isn't – and the parent-school team comes up with better plans and solutions.

Educator and mother Crystal Heltz, shared with me that “as an educator I have seen firsthand how parents struggle to come to meetings. Although virtual alternatives exist it hard for parents to find quiet private places to meet from work, and they may be confused about who is on the call. When Crystals son, had his first IEP meeting, there was a classroom teacher, special education teacher, administrator, speech therapist, occupational therapist, and district psychologist. She said that if she had to return quickly to work she would not have been able to properly address what they had to say and how to best move forward.

A study by the NIH states that parent involvement in a child's education is positively associated with a child's academic performance. In Indiana 19% of students in public schools are enrolled in special education, that's about 1 in 5 students. This is not a small issue. This effects working Hoosiers throughout our state. If we say Indiana is a family friendly state then our laws must support this assertion.

I urge you today to be policy makers who integrate efforts aimed at parental involvement to improve the academic success of our Hoosier children. I hope that you will vote in favor of SB 409.

Thank you for your time.