



7800 Shoal Creek Blvd., Ste. 171-E
Austin, TX 78757
v/tdd: 512.454.4816
intake: 800.315.3876
infoai@advocacyinc.org
www.advocacyinc.org

TESTIMONY TO SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

October 13, 2006

My name is Jeff Miller. I work for Advocacy, Inc., the state's protection and advocacy program for persons with disabilities. One of our responsibilities is informing policymakers about the impact of their proposals on Texans with disabilities.

I am here today in response to proposals that may at some point be considered by this Committee to create a voucher program for only students with disabilities. Though I realize there is no specific proposal on the table, I wanted to bring to you our general concerns about the concept while any proposal is still in its formative stages.

We have signed on to a position taken by the Disability Policy Consortium, an organization representing 25 statewide and 5 local disability organizations, opposing public school vouchers that take money from already underfunded public school programs. Because such important pieces of federal legislation as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and No Child Left Behind apply only to public schools, we know that most parents will leave their children where their rights are. It is not fair to them to deplete the already inadequate special education budget at the schools where their children will remain.

In private schools there is no recourse when it doesn't provide the services you were told it would, no guarantee of qualified teachers, no due process, and no place to complain to when things go wrong. The only recourse is to remove the child and return him to the public school, which now has less money in its special education budget.

Most specialized schools are expensive. The families most likely to participate in a voucher program are those with the financial resources to pay a private specialized school the difference between what the private school charges and the amount of the voucher. This is not even an option for most parents.

There is unfortunately much wrong with special education today and much the Legislature could do about it. We understand the frustration of some parents who have removed their children from public schools. But, vouchers are not the answer. We would hope that you would ask those parents to tell you about their experience in the public schools and then identify what went wrong and what as a state we could have done to prevent it from happening, or to see that it doesn't happen again. That is the response that we believe would be of the most benefit to the most students with disabilities.

We would encourage the Committee to work with us, or any of the DPC member organizations, to identify how the state can improve programs and outcomes for its students with disabilities. Thank you for your interest in special education.