



An Act to Improve Augmentative and Alternative Communication Opportunities for Students with Disabilities **HD # 908 (Rep. Cantwell)**

- This legislation amends teacher license regulations to require that all teachers who apply for an initial Massachusetts educator license receive instruction on the appropriate use of augmentative and alternative communication devices for children with disabilities who are nonverbal or who have limited speech.
- This legislation, which is a priority of the Massachusetts Autism Commission, builds upon Chapter 299 of the Acts of 2010 which required that all newly licensed teachers of students with moderate disabilities and teachers of students with severe disabilities receive instruction on the appropriate use of augmentative and alternative communication and other assistive technologies.
- By requiring **all** special education and general education teachers to have training on the appropriate use of augmentative and alternative communication, this bill will help reduce costs for school districts by facilitating inclusion and supporting placement of children with disabilities who are nonverbal or who have limited speech in the least restrictive environment.
- This bill will make a huge difference in the lives of thousands of children who are nonverbal or have limited speech, including children with Autism Spectrum Disorders, cerebral palsy, and acquired brain injury who rely on augmentative and alternative communication methods to interact with others.
- Augmentative and Alternative Communication, or AAC includes methods of communication other than oral speech, such as pictorial language boards, manual communication systems, speech synthesizers or other electronic communication devices, that enhance or replace conventional forms of expressive and receptive communication.
- Research demonstrates that use of AAC in general and special education settings for students who are nonverbal or have limited speech can lead to tremendous gains in academic, communication, social, and functional skills, and participation in a more complex curriculum.
- Federal special education law already requires school districts to provide assistive communication technology necessary for students who are nonverbal or who have limited speech to receive an appropriate education.
- In many instances, however, AAC assistive technology remains unavailable or is purchased but unused in a classroom because many teachers lack the training necessary to teach or use utilize these communication options. Children who are nonverbal or have limited speech are therefore often denied the essential AAC systems needed to communicate effectively with teachers and peers and to make effective progress.

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