



MASSACHUSETTS ADVOCATES *for* CHILDREN

An Act Creating Higher Education Opportunities for Students with Intellectual Disabilities, Autism Spectrum Disorders, and other Developmental Disabilities

H634 (Rep. Haddad, Rep Garballey) – **S698** (Sen. L'Italien)

These two bills allow persons with intellectual disabilities (ID) and persons with autism to access our state colleges and universities in order to gain skills necessary to work and live independently in the community as adults.

- **What is the problem?** Students without disabilities graduate and exit high school after 12th grade. In contrast, students with ID and autism typically remain in special education until age 22. Special education services for these students are often provided in ineffective and segregated programs, leading to poor employment outcomes, reliance on day habilitation programs, and dependence on government subsidies and support for much of their adult lives. Adults with ID and autism older than 22 often remain isolated without opportunities to gain skills in a higher education setting.
- **What is the solution?** Institutions of higher education can provide young adults with ID and autism with an effective, integrated, and cost-effective learning environment that teaches employment and adult living skills.
- **Can adults with ID and Autism Succeed in Higher Education?** Since 2007 hundreds of youth with severe disabilities have been successfully included in college through the state's groundbreaking grant program called *Mass Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Initiative (MAICEI)*. A legislative Task Force composed of legislators, higher education leaders, education experts, and state officials reviewed the *MAICEI* grant program and concluded that higher education provides an important pathway to integrated competitive employment and independent living for individuals with ID and autism. Similarly, national research data indicate that forty percent of adults with ID who attended college were able to find paid employment, compared to an employment rate of sixteen percent for those who did not.
- **What do these bills do?** These two bills implement Task Force recommendations by removing barriers that currently preclude most persons with ID and autism from participating in higher education. Individuals with ID and autism who are unable to pass MCAS and who do not obtain a regular high school diploma would be able to enroll in courses with their nondisabled peers and participate in extracurricular activities and other aspects of campus life, with supports and services to facilitate inclusion. These students would greatly benefit even though they would not earn a college degree.

The bills allow state colleges and universities to establish guidelines governing admission as well as course selection and enrollment. Supports and services to facilitate inclusion could be provided by the Department of Developmental Services, the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, the student's local school district or private funding.

The bills would require that the goals, mission statements and performance measures of our state colleges and universities provide for the inclusion of students with ID and autism, and would also address steps to support inclusive dormitory living. These bills would also codify the *MAICEI* grant program and allow the special education process to consider higher education as an option for students with disabilities who are 18 to 22 years old.

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