



YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES, PARENTS, EDUCATORS, ASSEMBLE AT THE STATE HOUSE TO URGE SUPPORT FOR H.159, TRANSITION LEGISLATION TO PROMOTE JOBS AND INDEPENDENCE FOR YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES

Youth with disabilities, parents, educators, and advocates from around the state along with Rep. Tom Sannicandro gathered at the State House on June 21, 2011 to present a 100ft. long petition to Governor Patrick demonstrating their support of bill H. 159 *An Act to Promote the Successful Transition of Students with Disabilities to Post-Secondary Education, Employment, and Independent Living*. This bill promotes employment opportunities, independent living, and post-secondary education for individuals with disabilities.



Rep. Tom Sannicandro and youth present the 100ft long petition in front of Governor Patrick's office

Over 100 supporters met with House sponsor Rep. Tom Sannicandro at the State House who gave a brief presentation on the importance of transitional services for youth with disabilities. Keith Jones, a well known disability rights advocate, and Brian Heffernan, a youth with Down syndrome also presented on their experiences with transition. Everyone then convened in front of the Governor's office where youth with disabilities presented to Governor Patrick a petition that included more than 1,000 signatures from parents, students, educators and administrators. The petition was unrolled and extended from the Governor's office down the hall to the House Chamber. The petition asks for support in enacting H.159, which will help ensure students with disabilities receive the federally mandated special education planning and services essential for a successful transition to the adult world.

House Bill 159, *An Act to Promote the Successful Transition of Students with Disabilities to Post-Secondary Education, Employment, and Independent Living*, changes special education licensure requirements to provide optional advanced training for current special educators and rehabilitation counselors who wish to obtain a specialist teacher license in transition services. With this advanced training, transition coordinators would have the necessary skills to focus on employment and independent living skills for the Commonwealth's students with disabilities ages 14-22.

"This is a workforce development bill. Not only will this bill address chronic unemployment among the disability community and improve outcomes for the state's youth with disabilities, but it will help to ensure that existing special education dollars are spent in a more effective manner", said Rep. Tom Sannicandro (D- Ashland), the House sponsor of H. 159, *An Act to promote the successful transition of students with disabilities to post-secondary education, employment, and independent living*.

Following the presentation many students, parents, educators, and legislators attended the Joint Education Committee Hearing held later that day at Gardner Auditorium to testify in overwhelming numbers supporting the legislation. [Click here to read copies of some of the testimony provided by supporters of H.159.](#)

"I firmly believe that government has an obligation to care for the most vulnerable amongst us by providing opportunities to those at risk to succeed and live independent fulfilling lives," said Senate sponsor Steven A. Tolman (D-Boston). "*H. 159* would provide for optional advanced training for educators to assist young adults transition from school to a meaningful career, employment opportunities, and independent living in the community. Too often today, individuals are not adequately prepared for the transition from school to adulthood. I am proud to be a sponsor of this common sense and much needed measure."