



**The Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates, Inc.**  
*A national voice for special education rights and advocacy*

April 1, 2014

The Honorable John Kline, Chairman  
Education & the Workforce Committee  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable George Miller, Ranking Member  
Education & the Workforce Committee  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Kline and Ranking Member Miller:

The Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates, Inc. (COPAA) is an independent, nonprofit, §501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization of attorneys, advocates, parents and related professionals. Over 1,400 COPAA members work to protect the civil rights and secure excellence in education on behalf of the 6.5 million children with disabilities in America. COPAA's mission is to be a national voice for special education rights and to promote excellence in advocacy. COPAA is grounded in the belief that every child deserves the right to a quality education that prepares him or her for meaningful employment, higher education, and lifelong learning, as well as full participation in his or her community.

COPAA is writing today in support of the introduction of the "Success and Opportunity through Quality Charter Schools Act" as currently written. Charter schools have long been touted as one of the most promising educational choice options, yet, disturbingly, data shows that students with disabilities (especially low incidence, more significant disabilities) are denied meaningful access to and a free appropriate public education within charter schools. While the number of charter schools is growing rapidly, questions have been raised about whether charter schools are appropriately serving students with disabilities. (See: GAO-12-543: Published: Jun 7, 2012).

Your bill takes several important steps toward emphasizing that students with disabilities must have equal access and that responsible entities must have full accountability for the outcomes of these students. Specifically, the bill:

- Requires that the State's applying entities include in its application an explanation of how it will work to "meet the needs of students served by such programs, including students with disabilities..."
- Requires that the State entity provide new assurances that it will provide technical assistance to enroll, to recruit and also to *retain* traditionally underserved students at rates similar to non-charter public schools.
- Requires that eligible charter schools abide by all federal laws impacting the educational and civil rights of students with disabilities and their families including: the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- Requires high-quality charter schools to demonstrate student academic achievement and lists an increase in graduation rates as an example of how a high charter school might accomplish such achievement.

COPAA commends you for these additions to the bill. We also urge you to engage in an open and public dialogue – and include in the Congressional Record – the many reasons why students with disabilities should be more equitably included in the recruitment, enrollment and retention efforts of charter schools receiving federal funds. Students with disabilities can and do achieve meaningful outcomes when they are taught to the same high standards as their peers and provided the instructional supports, services and accommodations they require to fully demonstrate their full range of knowledge of skills.

COPAA looks forward to working with you as the process moves forward to bring this bill to the House floor.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Denise Marshall". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "D" and "M".

Denise Marshall  
Executive Director