September 23, 2014

Ladies and gentleman,

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comment regarding the current MDE Complaint process. I am a parent of a student enrolled in Special Education. I am also an attorney who during college had the experience of caring for adults with various developmental disabilities. In spite of my background and extensive knowledge regarding my child, and my communications with the school district, the district has failed to appropriately support my child since preschool. I have tried every strategy that I can think of to try to improve the situation with little progress. This has included the filing of 2 special education complaints.

I have found that the current complaint system results in a lack of accountability. This lack of accountability is a tremendous disservice not only to the students and parents that are forced to deal with the current dysfunction but also to all residence of the State of Michigan. It forces parents to continually fight with the school district rather than engage in a collaborative dialogue designed to improve the education outcome. The system is not designed to foster potential in these children. There are many gaps. The attitude seems to be that if these children fail it is an acceptable result. It is this attitude combined that prompted my complaints and which continues to cause consternation. Through these reports I have learned that the system is stacked against the children. Provide FAPE is not the goal. Protecting the districts is the goal of the process.

Below are a few examples of the kind of issues that I have faced as well as the lack of response from the MDE.

I have expressed concern that the school district creates a hostile environment for parents advocating for the needs of their children and retaliates against parents engaging in this activity. The response received was that the MDE does not deal with personnel issue.

I have expressed concern that the district does not appropriately consider parent input. This had been demonstrated by not working to include my child in general education or provide appropriate interventions. The response was that I should consider due process. Due process is an expensive and time consuming process. Only 10% of parents prevail in due process. Parents coming to the MDE with issues are begging for help. This response is a clear indication that the MDE is turning their back on these families. The academic result is that my 5th grader is reading at a 1st grade level.

I expressed concern that in spite of my request that my child be included in an extracurricular activity at school, he was not provided access. The response was that because it was not in the IEP the district had no obligation to make any attempt to accommodate this request. Because of the hostile environment and the current IEP process, it is impossible to have the district add anything other than what is typically provided to the IEP.

Dawn Reamer