

## Testimony to Senate Education Committee on HB 861

April 26, 2011

Madam chairperson Shapiro and members, thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 861, which is the identical bill to SB 746 which this committee already passed. On behalf of TCASE and its membership we thank Senator Davis and Representative Patrick for bringing this important legislation forward. This bill deals with membership on the Governor's continuing special education advisory committee. **HB 861 calls for at least one member of this seventeen-member committee to be a director of a special education program in Texas public schools**

I want to highlight several points about HB 861:

- Federal law requires each state to have a continuing advisory committee for special education composed of 17 members (USC Sec 1412(a)(21) ) appointed by the governor; Federal guidelines for membership of the committee are general in nature, i.e., parents, advocates, service providers, educators, etc.;
- The function of the committee is to hold discussions and provide input to the state regarding services for persons with disabilities;
- Members of the committee are appointed for four year staggered terms;
- **According to the Texas Education Agency data regarding student enrollment in Texas public schools over 445,000 students with disabilities were served in Texas public school special education programs in the 2009-2010 school year; It is my belief that this population of persons with disabilities is the largest group served by any one state agency;**
- **It is also my belief that in order to have complete and accurate information and information representative of the services, requirements and challenges facing school-aged persons with disabilities, that a person serving as director of a school district special education program is needed on the committee; while parents will always compose the majority of members of the committee, it is important that the perspective of a person overseeing a program implementing educational services for students with disabilities in public schools share information and provide answers about public school programs.**

Thank you for your attention and please support HB 861. I will be happy to answer any questions.

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