



T.I.G.E.R. Newsletter

Tennessee Initiative for Gifted Education Reform

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Status of Maddox Bill HB2934

In January, Representative Mark Maddox of Weakley County introduced a bill into the Tennessee General Assembly that would remove gifted education from special education. **The bill is scheduled for a subcommittee vote on Wednesday, March 6.**

TIGER strongly opposes this bill and encourages parents to contact the members of the House K12 Education Subcommittee to register their opposition.

On February 26 the House Education Committee heard testimony from supporters and opponents of HB2934. Dr. Lynnette Henderson, an assistant professor of special education at Austin Peay State University, represented TIGER. She argued that gifted education should remain a part of special education for educational and economic reasons. Dr. Henderson predicted that gifted students and their parents would lose significant legal rights and protections in the transition from special education to general education.

Education Commissioner Faye Taylor strongly opposed the Maddox bill at the hearing. She argued that gifted students have significant needs that might go unmet as a result of a hastily crafted policy. Commissioner Taylor said that **if** there is a need to move gifted out of special education, the plan should be carefully crafted and considered by all parties **before** any legislation is introduced.

Dr. Steve Ramsey, a special education administrator in Weakley County, spoke in support of the Maddox bill. He argued that gifted children don't fit into special education because they are not disabled and special education teachers are not properly trained.

TIGER disagrees with the rationale in support of the Maddox bill. TIGER's position is that moving gifted from special education would be unwise for the following reasons:

- Many special education teachers in Tennessee have extensive training in gifted education. Not utilizing their expertise would be harmful to gifted education.
 - Very few regular classroom teachers in Tennessee are trained to meet the needs of the gifted or have the time to do so.
 - Gifted students would lose significant rights in the transition to general education.
 - It was the special education requirement that led to the creation of programs like CLUE in Memphis and ENCORE in Nashville. Eliminating the requirement would clearly undermine the programs.
- Rep. Maddox may attempt to amend the bill to quell criticism. However, hasty amendments cannot correct its fundamental flaws.

Contacting Legislators

The toll-free number for all legislators is 800-449-8366. Here is the list of the subcommittee members (with extension numbers) who will be voting on the Maddox bill on 3/6:

Tommie Brown (x1-4374), Ronnie Davis (x1-6934), Joe Towns (x1-2189), Gene Davidson (x1-3979), Ulysses Jones (x1-4575), Mark Maddox (x1-7847), Richard Montgomery (x1-5981), Johnny Shaw (x1-4538), David Shepard (x1-3513), Larry Turner (x1-6954), Zane Whitson (x1-6800), Glen Casada (x1-4389)

Remember, tell them to vote against the bill *even if amended* and indicate the bill number – HB2934. It takes only a few minutes to call everyone on the list since you will likely be talking to an assistant or answering machine.

For more information

To learn more about TIGER, local activities, and meetings, visit the website (www.giftedtn.go.to) or contact a local representative.

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TIGER is a statewide, non-profit organization of parents and other advocates working to strengthen educational opportunities for academically gifted children in Tennessee.