

**Testimony before the District of Columbia Council
Committee on Education
June 19th, 2014**

**Hearing on B20-723 “Special Education Student Rights Act of 2014”, B20-724 “Enhanced
Special Education Services Act of 2014”, and B20-725 “Special Education Quality
Improvement Act of 2014”**

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My name is Jose Macedo and I am a resident of Ward 1 and the brother of Marco, a student with special needs at a DCPS school. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of requiring DC schools to begin transition planning for students with disabilities at 14 years old.

When my brother was in the 10th grade, I noticed he was having trouble with his classwork. Even though he was passing his classes, he couldn't read the time on an analog clock and couldn't give change. The school said that my brother was at risk of failing, but would pass if he stayed after school.

My brother began to withdraw from family and friends and did not participate in activities he previously enjoyed. I was concerned that he might be depressed, so I took him to the doctor and he was referred for a psychological evaluation. This evaluation discovered that my brother has an intellectual disability. I asked his school to take a look at his IEP because of the results of the recent evaluation. The school said that no changes to the IEP were necessary, even though the evaluation called for many changes to his IEP.

The school insisted that my brother did not need changes to his IEPs. It took 3 meetings with the school and an appearance in front of a judge to get the changes in his IEP that the evaluation recommended.

Even though my brother did not have basic academic skills and was not making progress in school, the school had him on a diploma track. I wanted my brother to get the education he needed to be independent. I wanted my brother to be able to find his way home and go shopping by himself, and school was not preparing him for these things by giving him material that he didn't understand and then passing him to the next grade every year. When I asked my brother if he understood his coursework, he said that the teachers would explain the work to him, but he didn't understand it, and the teachers told him what to write on his papers.

Although my brother has had an IEP all through his time at school, his intellectual disability was not identified until he was in the 10th grade. Instead of considering my brother's strengths and needs and creating a plan for him to be independent after high school, the school just put him into the necessary classes for a diploma. No one asked my brother what he wanted to do after high school. When I asked him what he wanted to do after school he said he had no idea.

My brother is now at a new school and is making progress. He's able to follow directions and help with the laundry, shopping, and cooking, but a lot of time has been wasted. If the school had begun preparing him for life after high school earlier, he would have gained these skills at a younger age instead of spending many years frustrated by school work that did not meet his needs. If the school had started planning for my brother's life after school when he was 14, his intellectual disability and need for a vocational program may have been discovered earlier. Changing the law so that schools must begin planning at 14 will help prepare many students like my brother to be successful, independent adults.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.