

My name is Jennifer Friend, and I am representing myself and my son, Jack. I am one of the 99% of Texas parents who fight desperately to obtain special education services for our children yet lose our due process hearings. I am urging you to support SB 1490 to transfer due process hearings from the TEA to SOAH.

Our little boy Jack is 7 years old. Jack has autism. We have provided intensive therapy for Jack since he was 2. When Jack was 4 we asked Lake Travis ISD to admit him into their special ed preschool program. We provided medical reports explaining Jack's diagnosis of autism as well as therapy reports from neurologists, psychologists and speech and occupational therapists. This thick binder shows the huge amount of medical documentation we had.

Lake Travis ISD conducted its own evaluation of Jack. They determined that Jack actually did NOT have autism, therefore he was denied access to special education.

I was there the morning that the district did its one, brief observation of Jack in his regular preschool and then reported seeing no unusual behavior. However, that morning Jack ran out of the school building in a panic and was found in another building. The district omitted this incident from their report. Further, they NEVER saw Jack speak to ANYONE that day. Instead they watched as he rode a tricycle around in circles over and over while reciting a video script verbatim instead of playing with peers – typical autistic behavior. This was also omitted.

So we asked Lake Travis ISD to observe Jack in school a second time. **THEY REFUSED.** We asked for an independent evaluation and for mediation. **THEY REFUSED.** Instead they told us just to enroll Jack in their regular kindergarten with **NO SUPPORT** or plan in place. The thought of putting our terrified boy into a classroom with **NO SUPPORT** or safety net was unbearable. No child or parent should have to endure this.

So we went to a due process hearing, knowing that parents almost always lose. And, we did lose. The hearing officer did not appear to be impartial. Just like the district, the hearing officer put little weight on the medical reports of autism. Even after hearing 3 days of testimony from Jack's doctors, teachers and therapists, the hearing officer **only** included evidence in her findings of fact that supported the school district's position. Our testimony had made no difference whatsoever.

So we left our home and moved to Austin ISD. They performed a thorough evaluation and used our medical documentation. AISD agreed that Jack has autism and began providing special ed support. Now in first grade, Jack still requires 1:1 support at the beginning of each day, but he no longer runs out of the building, and he plays with other children. He is thriving.

As painful as it was, we were lucky to be able to move to a better district. Most families are not as fortunate. We need hearing officers to be impartial. I urge you to please support this bill. Thank you so very much.