



**LEGISLATION & PUBLIC
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April 24, 2018

Honorable Patrick O'Donnell
Chair, Education Committee
California State Assembly
Capitol Building, Room 2196
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 2168 (THURMOND) as amended April 4, 2018 – SUPPORT

Dear Assembly Member O'Donnell:

Disability Rights California (DRC), a non-profit advocacy organization that advances and protects the rights of Californians with disabilities, **supports AB 2168**. This bill is scheduled for hearing in the Assembly Education Committee on April 25, 2018.

AB 2168 appropriates \$2,000,000 in carryover funding from the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act to the Superintendent of Public Instruction to establish a statewide framework and training and support network for the purpose of training and supporting qualified mentor teachers who will be supporting the new statewide influx of special education teachers in California.

As currently drafted, the measure requires the State Department of Education to award grants on a competitive basis using criteria it establishes. Among other provisions, the bill requires the department to offer \$1,500,000 from the funds appropriated as grants to local educational agencies to create or expand local and regional infrastructure to support special education teacher mentoring for the purpose of supporting the retention of new special education teachers.

DRC appreciates and supports the intent behind this bill. There is a shortage of special education teachers in the state and this is an issue that needs addressing. However, we do have some questions with the current language in the bill that we would like to work with the author to address. For example:

- 1) "High-quality" mentor teachers are not defined, therefore, we are not sure what this means. Other Education Code sections use the term "highly qualified" which is defined.
- 2) We think it would be helpful to provide some prioritization in the measure. AB 2168 mentions nothing about prioritizing socio-economically or geographically disadvantaged (i.e., rural, mountain) districts that have the hardest time drawing teachers to their schools. As these districts also seem less likely to be able to generate the dollar-for-dollar matching funds needed to apply for a grant, DRC has some concerns that this may end up funneling money into districts that already do a comparatively decent job of recruiting and retaining teachers.
- 3) One of the problems behind the special education teacher shortage is that there are not enough people getting special education credentials. Because the bill provides few specifics, there is a lack of clarity as to how the measure will infuse new people into special education teaching, rather than just moving existing teachers around.

We look forward to working with the author to address these questions as the measure moves forward. Please contact me if you have any questions about our position or if I can provide any further information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Evelyn M. Abouhassan".

Evelyn Abouhassan
Senior Legislative Advocate
Disability Rights California

cc: Honorable Tony Thurmond, California State Assembly
Michael Lucien, Legislative Director, Office of Assembly Member
Thurmond
Honorable Members, Assembly Education Committee
Chelsea Kelley, Consultant, Assembly Education Committee
Robert Becker, Consultant, Assembly Republican Caucus Committee