

Special Education Advocacy and Attorneys

Navigating Special Education rights, options, and services can feel overwhelming. This handout is designed to give you a sense of where you can go for help with the process, either by hiring assistance or finding other resources to know and exercise your rights.

What are Special Education Advocates and Attorneys?

Special education advocates and attorneys are privately hired support persons for those who feel they need assistance navigating the Special Education process. You can hire these individuals to consult on questions, attend IEPs, research and navigate discussions on your behalf, and answer questions about local, federal, and state requirements for Special Education. Attorneys are able to bring a lawsuit against the school if you determine that is the appropriate course of action. Their services are generally more costly than those of advocates.

What Training do They Have?

Training varies widely and you should ask. Any attorney should have completed law school and passed the bar in this state in order to operate as an attorney. Their legal background may or may not all be involved with Special Education.

Advocates are not certified and have no formal training that is mandated. Be sure to ask about their background in general and in working with cases like yours.

Who Are Some Local Market Rate Options?

Attorneys

Cheri and Harold Belkowitz http://www.belkowitzlaw.com/ (703) 246-9270	Juliet Hiznay http://jdhiznay.com/ (202) 352-8982	Brownley Law Group www.brownleylaw.com (703) 758-5562
Joan Proper http://www.jproperlaw.com/ 703-291-6660	Caitlin McAndrews https://mcandrewslaw.com/ 202-735-2300 x243	

Advocates

Brooke Varma www.InclusionConsultants.com (571) 292-7560 Brooke@InclusionConsultants.com	Sharon Weiss http://www.sharonkweiss.com (703) 356-5534 sharonkweiss@cox.net	Lisa Fagan http://www.lisafaganlaw.com/ (571) 331-5626 fagan6@cox.net
Connie Lorenzen (571) 309-3787 Connie.lorentzen@gmail.com		Kimberly Greenspan (703) 620-0206 ksg@educationadvocatesnova.com

What about Free or Low-Cost Services?

It is very difficult to obtain free or reduced cost assistance. Here are some ideas and options that are generally free or lower cost, but know they may not always be available to you.

Other Options:

- IEP Parenting Virginia accepts families on a sliding scale based on income, <https://www.iepparentingvirginia.org/>.
- Visionary Solutions can provide a free hotline for questions and private advocates on a sliding scale, www.visionarysolutions.online
- The Arc of Northern Virginia is able to offer some free consultations thanks to the generosity of retired attorney, Patricia Connolly. Look for them at <https://thearcofnova.org/events/>
- If your child qualifies for free or reduced lunch at school, you likely qualify for legal aid, www.lsnv.org. They may or may not be able to take your particular case.
- The disAbility Law Center of Virginia likes to take cases for people having trouble exercising their rights that will have a broad impact on services for others, <http://dlcv.org/> or 800-552-3962.
- The Legal Aid Justice Center can take limited cases, and are more likely to be able to take cases for immigrant families, <https://www.justice4all.org/> or 703-778-3450.
- You can ask an attorney or advocate if they have a sliding scale or can take into account any extenuating circumstances. This is a common request, so they are not always able to say yes.
- You can become an educated and savvy advocate for your loved one on your own. Here are some great options to get started:
 - One of our best special education resources is PEATC, a local non-profit that provides families with information about the IEP process and updates on education law and policy. www.peatc.org
 - Wrights Law (www.wrightslaw.com) offers paid advocacy training for parents along with a free e-newsletter and informative website with lots of hard to find educational information, like details on behavior management in schools.
 - The Down Syndrome Association of Northern Virginia often offers free workshops for parents on IEPs. <http://www.dsanv.org>
 - Parents of adopted or foster children can contact Formed Families Forward about their educational consulting and counseling. <http://formedfamiliesforward.org/services>
- Lastly, if your child is in crisis, ask your school social worker about funding in-home services through the Comprehensive Services Act (www.csa.virginia.gov).