

NATIONAL
DISABILITY RIGHTS
NETWORK



Protection & Advocacy for Individuals with Disabilities

June 21, 2019

Dear Senators Casey, Cassidy, Hassan, and Young

The National Disability Rights Network (NDRN) writes to thank you for the introduction of S. 1585, the Respond, Innovate, Succeed, and Empower (RISE) Act. NDRN is pleased that this legislation contains thoughtful policy solutions which will address many of the barriers that students with disabilities experience as they endeavor to transition from the K-12 school system to post-secondary education.

NDRN is the non-profit membership organization for the federally mandated Protection and Advocacy (P&A) and Client Assistance Program (CAP) agencies for individuals with disabilities. The P&A and CAP agencies were established by the United States Congress to protect the rights of people with disabilities and their families through legal support, advocacy, referral, and education. P&As and CAPs are in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Territories (American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, and the US Virgin Islands), and there is a P&A and CAP affiliated with the Native American Consortium which includes the Hopi, Navajo, and San Juan Southern Paiute Nations in the Four Corners region of the Southwest. Collectively, the 57 P&A and CAP agencies are the largest provider of legally based advocacy services to people with disabilities in the United States. One of the critical areas of focus for the P&A/CAP agencies is education related issues. In 2016, the P&As worked on nearly 14,000 individual and hundreds of systemic cases related to education and the enforcement of the civil rights of students with disabilities.

NDRN is particularly pleased that the RISE Act requires that Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) accept a variety of documents including an Individual Education Program (IEP), a 504 plan, notice from a doctor, or an evaluation from a psychologist as evidence of a disability when a student seeks accommodations in higher education. For far too long, students with disabilities seeking accommodations in higher education have had to navigate often insurmountable logistical as well as economic hurdles to simply access their rights under the law. NDRN is also pleased that the RISE Act would authorize \$10 million for the National Center for Information and Technical Support for Post-Secondary Students with Disabilities.

This resource center would provide clear information about disability services offered by colleges and the supports available – a critical resource which, heretofore, has been lacking. Finally, NDRN is pleased that the National Center for Information and Technical Support for Post-Secondary Students with Disabilities would also support professional development about disability for college faculty.

Thank you again for your work and support of the RISE Act – an important piece of legislation which will help to make higher education truly accessible to all students - including students with disabilities.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Amanda Lowe, Senior Public Policy Analyst at Amanda.lowe@ndrn.org

Sincerely,

Curt Decker
Executive Director