

## **The Alice Cogswell and Anne Sullivan Macy Act**

### *Advocating for the Cogswell-Macy Act*

**Take Action!** Ask your two U.S. Senators to introduce the Alice Cogswell and Anne Sullivan Macy Act (Cogswell-Macy Act), bipartisan legislation introduced in the House as H.R. 3535. Find out more at <http://www.afb.org/cogswellmacyact>

**What is the Cogswell/Macy Act?** Named, respectively, in honor of the first deaf girl to be formally educated in the United States and for Helen Keller's beloved teacher, the Cogswell-Macy Act would strengthen the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and improve results for the more than 500,000 children and youth who are blind, visually impaired, deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind (sensory disabilities), including those who also have additional disabilities. Key provisions of the legislation include:

- Ensure that every student with sensory disabilities is properly identified, evaluated and served regardless of their formal disability category or classification so that all such students, including those with additional disabilities, can truly receive a free and appropriate public education.
- Expect states to conduct strategic planning, and commit such planning to writing, to guarantee that all students with sensory disabilities within each state receive all specialized instruction and services needed by such students provided by properly trained personnel.
- Ramp up U.S. Department of Education responsibilities to monitor and report on states' compliance with their obligations with respect to instruction and services specifically provided to students with sensory disabilities.
- Assist parents and educators of students with sensory disabilities through regular and up-to-date written policy guidance from the U.S. Department of Education.
- Establish a national collaborative organizational resource, the Anne Sullivan Macy Center on Vision Loss and Educational Excellence, to proliferate evidence-based practices in the education of students with vision loss, to keep special educators current with the latest instructional methods, and to supplement state and local educational agency provision of the instruction and services constituting the Expanded Core Curriculum, the full array of specialized services and skills that students with vision loss need.

**Why is the Bill Needed?** Since 1975, Public Law 94-142, now the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), has revolutionized educational opportunity for all children and youth with disabilities. However, without key improvements, our national special education system cannot fully keep IDEA's promise of a truly appropriate education for students with sensory disabilities.

The Cogswell-Macy Act is intended to do just that, to improve the delivery of appropriate special education and related services to all students with sensory disabilities, including students who may have additional disabilities. Once enacted, the legislation will ensure that properly designed and individually tailored services are provided consistently nationwide and that the specialized educators who offer such services are prepared and supported to do their jobs well, based on evidence-driven best practice.

**What is the Strategy?** The U.S. Congress must review and amend IDEA as part of Congress's periodic reauthorization of that law. The Cogswell-Macy Act can be passed by Congress at any time in advance of IDEA reauthorization, or it can be incorporated, in whole or in part, into reauthorization itself. In either case, the Cogswell-Macy Act represents our community's unified voice in support of much-needed improvements to IDEA. By calling on Congress to promptly pass the Cogswell-Macy Act now, we communicate our sense of urgency and that the changes we seek are long overdue. Should Congress fail to act on the Cogswell-Macy bill itself, the bill will continue to be the source from which Congress will draw the specific proposals for the changes we are calling for.

**What will it Cost?** Currently every year, the federal government spends nearly \$12 billion to help states offer special education to students with disabilities. While this is a significant investment, it represents only about 16% of the total national cost of special education today. The Cogswell-Macy Act does not add to these costs but rather puts safeguards in place to ensure that funds spent on students with sensory disabilities are maximized and used for the most effective services. Without the Cogswell-Macy Act, both federal and state dollars can be misdirected to services that are ineffective because they do not meet the unique educational needs of students with sensory disabilities. In addition, the Cogswell-Macy Act establishes a national resource center, not unlike such resources currently serving the deafness and deaf-blindness communities, to strengthen the capacity of the vision loss community to provide effective special education and related services. This center would be supported through a federal investment of \$22 million per year, a cost that represents about 0.02% of all federal special education spending.

**For further information, contact:**

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