

Special Education Advocates and Attorneys

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 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 Options?

Attorneys

<p>Cheri and Harold Belkowitz http://www.belkowitzlaw.com/ 10427 North St., Suite 200 Fairfax, VA 22030 (703) 246-9270 CBelkowitz@belkowitzlaw.com HBelkowitz@belkowitzlaw.com</p>	<p>Juliet Hiznay http://jdhiznay.com/ (202) 352-8982 juliet@jdhiznay.com</p>	<p>Brownley Law Group www.brownleylaw.com 11710 Plaza America Drive, Ste 2000 Reston, VA 20190 (703) 758-5562 info@brownleylaw.com</p>
---	---	--

Advocates

<p>Brooke Varma www.InclusionConsultants.com (571-292-7560 Brooke@InclusionConsultants.com</p>	<p>Sharon Weiss http://www.sharonkweiss.com 6832 Old Dominion Drive, Suite 200 McLean, VA 22101 (703) 356-5534 sharonkweiss@cox.net</p>	<p>Starfish Savers http://www.starfishsavers.com PO Box 230636 Centreville, VA 20120 (703) 631-9557 info@starfishsavers.com</p>
<p>Connie Lorentzen (571) 309-3787 Connie.lorentzen@gmail.com</p>	<p>Lisa Fagan http://www.lisafaganlaw.com/ (571) 331-5626 fagan6@cox.net</p>	

What about Free or Low Cost Services?

It is very difficult to obtain free or reduced cost assistance. 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.

Other Options:

- The Virginia Office of Protection and Advocacy likes to take cases for people having trouble exercising their rights that will have a broad impact on services for others, www.vopa.state.va.us or 800-552-3962.
- 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 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.org](http://www.peatc.org)) is 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/base.cgim?template=iep_support
- Go to www.asnv.org, scroll to the bottom in the Connect With Us section and join their Yahoo group to ask questions about the best schools and IEP strategies.
- Residents of Loudon can reach out to Melissa Heifetz for consulting questions, www.paxtoncampus.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).