



Team Shawnie
ADVOCACY GROUP

Fall 2025 Newsletter

www.teamshawniegroup.org



Join Our Circle Of Honor

Thanks to the generosity of supporters like you, we've been able to provide over 1,000 services to children and families in need. Now, we're inviting you to become a monthly donor—a vital partner in sustaining the work we do every day.

Your voice and outreach are essential to the success of this campaign. Together, we can ensure lasting support for the families and communities that count on us. Monthly giving is easy, flexible, and powerful. You choose the amount, and you can change or cancel anytime. Become a monthly donor today and join a dedicated group we call our Circle of Honor.

Visit our Circle Of Honor here:

<https://teamshawniegroup.com/circle-of-honor/>

Visit our Circle Of Excellence here:

<https://teamshawniegroup.com/circle-of-excellence/>

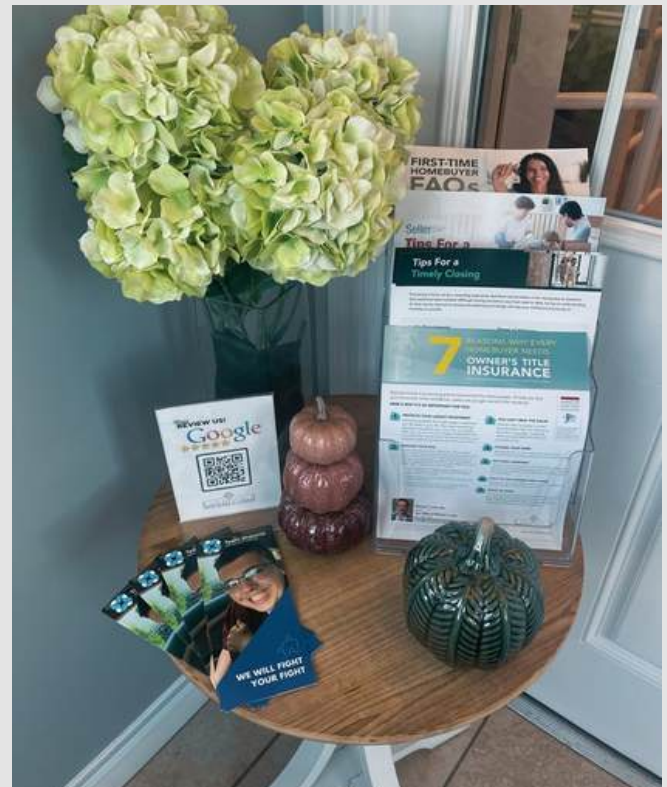
Watch one of our staff members explain the Circle Of Honor here:

<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/tmQjNX8f7co>



To make a contribution please click here:

<https://givebutter.com/m2J3mi>



Thank you to one of our sponsors

The Law Office of Michael C. Lima is a proud sponsor of the Team Shawnie Advocacy Group. Attorney Michael C. Lima serves as the President of the Board for Team Shawnie Advocacy Group.



Team Shawnie
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We are looking for

SPECIAL NEEDS FAMILIES

to advocate for



*Facing a complex journey requires
specialized professional support.
Don't go it alone...*

We Will Fight Your Fight

Are you a special needs family feeling lost in the system? Our advocacy services are here to guide you through the challenges of neurodiversity, ensuring your loved ones get the support they deserve. Let us stand by your side and help you navigate this journey with confidence and care.

Special needs families shouldn't face the system alone — we're here to advocate and guide you every step of the way.



If you or someone you know is facing a difficult time with a child on the spectrum and have no idea where to start contact us

Get in touch today!

info@teamshawniegroup.com

www.teamshawniegroup.org



H.248 is an Act ensuring the appropriate and timely payment and residential service placement for children deemed to be a safety risk.

This act was heard before the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities during their hearing on Monday, September 22nd, 2025. Thank you to House Representative Steven S. Howitt and his staff for their ongoing support of this important bill. We are eagerly awaiting the outcome of Bill H.248 and will keep you updated!



Steven S. Howitt
State Representative

What happens next?

Once the bill has been introduced and filed by Mr. Howitt, the bill is assigned to a relevant committee, where it's reviewed, debated, and may be amended. If approved by the committee, the bill moves to the House or Senate floor for a vote. If it passes in one chamber, it then goes to the other chamber to go through the same process. If both the Massachusetts House and Senate pass the bill, it is sent to the Governor, who can either sign it into law or veto it. If vetoed, the legislature can override the veto with a two-thirds majority vote.

Stay tuned for updates on this bill by going to: <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/194/H248>



Team Shawnie
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In The News Room

Stories Relevant To Our Mission



Dept. of Education failed to protect students from potential abuse



Here is one of the most important reasons that we do what we do.

Newly released report by Massachusetts state auditor's office claims allegations of abuse went untracked and uninvestigated.

Here is a link to the full report: <https://www.wcvb.com/.../mass-state-audit-child.../65897983>

We will continue fighting against this type of systemic abuse and negligence for as long as we can, it is part of our mission.

To view our previews newsletters go to <https://teamshawniegroup.com/newsletter/>



Team Shawnie
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Our Mission Updates

www.teamshawniegroupp.org

Because of your generous contributions
we have been able to...



**Advocate for over 60
families**



**Advocate for over 120
children**



**Attend well over 350
meetings**



**Have a sucess win rate
over 98%**

To learn more about our services please visit us at
www.teamshawniegroupp.org



Team Shawnie
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Shane, Shawnie, and Cheryl Halajko



Our Family Corner

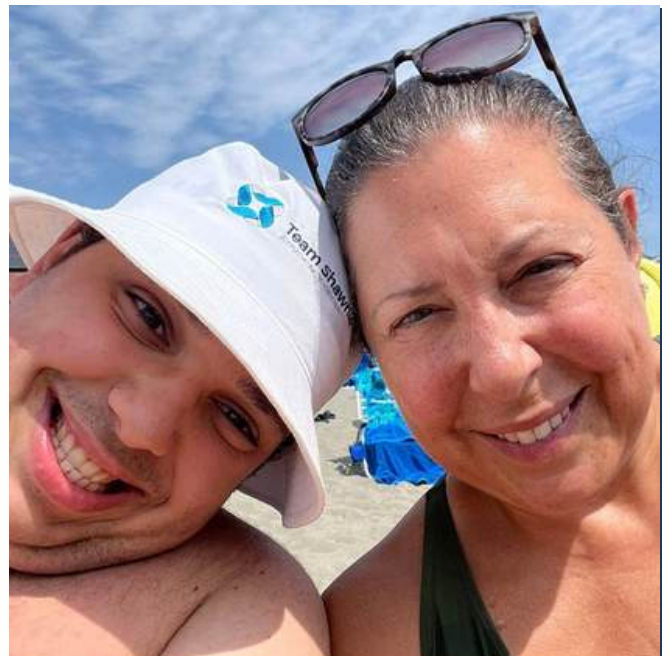
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Shawnie Goes Shopping!

Shawnie on his amazing home visit this past weekend! He did one of his favorite activities (shopping) and made a fun craft with the shells he collected from the beach this summer. Love seeing that smile



Shawnie cooking up a storm at home while visiting



Shawnie's beach day!

Shawn had a fun day at the beach! He loves all the wonderful sensory input he gets from the feels of the sand, seaweed,, and swimming in the ocean! He collected some beautiful shells too!



Team Shawnie
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Our Staff Updates

www.teamshawniegroup.org



Advocacy is at the heart of everything we do—it's the voice, the shield, and the guiding light for families navigating the challenges of special needs. We are deeply grateful for our dedicated advocates who work tirelessly to ensure every child gets the support and justice they deserve. Each time we welcome a new advocate into our Team Shawnie family, it's a moment of celebration and renewed hope. Together, we're building a stronger, more inclusive future—one voice, one family at a time.

The Team Shawnie Advocacy Group would love to give a warm welcome to Emily Novia, a great addition to our team.



Team Shawnie
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Team Shawnie Advocacy Group would love to welcome

EMILY NOVIA

to our community

She is a Communications Advisor / Communication
Major @ University of California Santa Barbara

Welcome to the Team Shawnie family!



Team Shawnie
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A Letter Of Support

by Shane Halajko Jr.



Shane Halajko Jr.

Dear Members of the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities,

I'm writing this letter of support on behalf of my dear friends and family at the Team Shawnie Advocacy Group here in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. In honor of my brother Shawnie's story, the Team Shawnie Advocacy Group (TSAG) was founded as a Non-Profit Organization in 2021 to create an additional resource for families struggling to navigate our nation's special education system. Since our founding, we have met and worked with dozens of families throughout New England to help them advocate for their child's right to special education in public schools. It is through this work, and from our own experiences fighting for my brother Shawnie's special education services, that we have witnessed both the successes and shortcomings of the Commonwealth's education system in its attempt to meet the demand for vital special education accommodations that are necessary to preserve the integrity of disability rights in America as a nation. I submit this letter to your committee in support of House Bill 248 to stress the imminent moral burden on the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to make systemic adjustments through legislation and to embrace the opportunity to spearhead a movement of special education reform throughout the nation as a whole.

In our current special education funding model, established by the Circuit Breaker Program in 2004, many families of children with severe special needs are faced with the undue burden of arguing for their children's education accommodations while simultaneously dealing with a crisis at home. This is the experience that my family endured while Shawnie was a young boy diagnosed with Autism and struggling to regulate his severe behavioral issues. By establishing TSAG and working with families throughout the Commonwealth to advocate for special education services, we learned rather quickly that he is not alone. In light of this harsh reality, it is much more reasonable for the Commonwealth to adjust its system accordingly by passing House Bill 248, to prevent the increasing number of cases just like Shawnie's. While the Circuit Breaker Program was an important step down the path of progress for special education and disability reform, it falls short of efficiently remedying the heavy burden it places on the 25% of forgotten families of children with special needs throughout the Commonwealth.

Despite its oversights, the Commonwealth's Circuit Breaker Program has paved the way for more effective and practical reform. The program rightfully attempted to codify the progress made at the federal level but fell short of actually relieving school districts and families of the financial burden that comes with the need for special education services. The Commonwealth's current system successfully acknowledges the need to protect disabled children from discrimination and marginalization. However, by only covering 75% of the steep prices of special education services like ABA therapy and residential programs, the system fails to provide effective relief to the remaining 25% of communities struggling with the challenges of caring for a child with special needs on their own. Today, nearly 10 years after the end of Shawnie's fight for his own public education, many other Commonwealth families of children with special needs and their advocates are faced with the same challenge that Shawnie and his team faced back in 2006; that the cost of individualized special education services for some students is once again too high, and as a result school districts are inclined to adopt a strict interpretation of IDEA's least-to-most-restrictive standard to prevent their budget from breaking.



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A Letter Of Support

by *Shane Halajko Jr.*



Shane Halajko Jr.

The Circuit Breaker Program's requirement of school districts to cover 25% of the special education costs poses a couple of glaring issues. First, it incentivizes schools to cut funding from other valuable educational programs and tools to meet their responsibilities as a caretaker under FAPE and IDEA. Second, it encourages rigid interpretations of special education policies to keep the school's budget balanced. The more severe a child's disability is, like in the case of Shawnie, the more intensive and expensive their special education services will be. For my brother, this meant that every month a school board would meet to discuss, in part, if his right to a free appropriate public education and a safe home was worth the cost of maintenance. By only agreeing to cover 75% of the cost of special education services, the Commonwealth enables the systemic discrimination and marginalization of the remaining 25% of our special education citizenry.

Finally, it is my contention that Shawnie's Story can be retold as a way to point out the glaring issues that still exist in our special education system today and push the Commonwealth down the path of progress. By examining his case, along with dozens of cases just like his in the Commonwealth alone, it becomes clearer that any family would crack under the pressure of oppression without support from their community. Due to the severity of Shawnie's experiences in the Commonwealth's education system, we have a unique opportunity as members of the legal community to spot the glaring issues his case presents in order to spare the next generation from his suffering. Fortunately, we have the ability to prevent future generations from experiencing this type of injustice. It is for these reasons that I submit this letter to your committee in support of House Bill 248, in honor of my brother Shawnie – one amongst many citizens of the Commonwealth who were marginalized by this critical flaw in our special education system.

Best Regards,

Shane J. Halajko Jr., J.D.

Team Shawnie Advocacy Group | Board Vice Chairman

Suffolk University Law School, Boston, MA

508.491.7057

www.teamshawniegroupp.com

**Shane Halajko Jr. is Team Shawnie's Advocacy Group Vice President, Senior Advocate, and also a JD Suffolk Law graduate. He also happens to be Shawnie's older brother.*



Please Share & Like

Team Shawnie's Social Media Outlets

When you “Like” you stay informed, when you “Share” you inform others

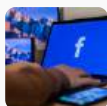
We kindly ask you to share and like our social media postings to help spread awareness about Autism and the vital advocacy work we do. Each like and share increases our reach, allowing more families in need to discover our services and find the support they deserve. Your engagement helps build a stronger, more informed community, making a real difference in the lives of those we serve.

Please Share & Like and thank you for your continued support!



YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCZ-SLNVnHO3qEpejHoMnB5g>



Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/TeamShawnie>



Instagram

<https://www.instagram.com/teamshawniegroup>