

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD 2011

Representative Michael Bileca

Representative Michael Bileca (R) was elected to the House of Representatives in 2010. He is the representative for District 117 which is in the Miami area. Representatives enter public life wanting to make a difference. However, it is unusual for a freshman representative to champion a cause and carry it through the legislative process in his first year in office.

No one told Representative Bileca this fact. When he was approached to sponsor the bill that would allow students on a 504 Plan to receive the McKay Scholarship, he did not hesitate in accepting the challenge. Having a family member who is dyslexic, and who struggled in school without assistance, made this a personal issue for Representative Bileca as well.

Members of The McKay Coalition who assisted in gathering information for Representative Bileca were amazed at his grasp of the issue and his willingness to stand before naysayers and fight for more options for children with disabilities. His leadership and support of this bill will change thousands of children's lives.

We are very pleased to present Representative Michael Bileca with the Distinguished Service Award. We look forward to having him as a champion for students with disabilities in the years to come.



Dr. Patricia K. Hardman



Dr. Patricia K. Hardman is the founder and Chief Operating Officer of Dyslexia Research Institute which is based in Tallahassee. She has studied and worked in the field of dyslexia, ADHD and related learning disorders since the early 1970's.

Dr. Hardman has developed a complete curriculum (reading, math, grammar, and study skills) for children with dyslexia, ADHD and related language disorders. She has been involved in primary research in the area of dyslexia. Dr. Hardman has presented at international, national and state conferences. She has authored numerous articles.

Dr. Hardman's efforts have helped to change many of the laws in Florida relating to students with disabilities. In 1985 Dr. Hardman worked with Representative Betty Easley to develop Florida Statute 1007.265 which allows college students with disabilities to substitute courses for required courses such as math and foreign language. This has allowed thousands of students in Florida to complete their college education as opposed to having to drop out because of these courses.

When the FCAT only allowed an abacus as the "calculator" for students with dyscalculia and visual impairments, Dr. Hardman and Senator Steve Wise brought this matter before the Senate. She helped to craft legislation that would allow appropriate accommodations on the FCAT for students with disabilities.

Dr. Hardman worked with Senator John McKay on the drafting of the McKay Scholarship Program. She was appointed to the McKay Task Force when accountability measures were being discussed and created in the early years of the program. Dr. Hardman worked with Governor Bush in holding back legislation that would over-regulate the private schools accepting McKay Scholarships. The Accountability Legislation that was passed in 2006 stayed true to the goal of letting parents have choice in educating their children with disabilities, while allowing private schools the autonomy to develop their programs to fit the needs of the child.

Dr. Hardman worked tirelessly this year with The Coalition Board to draft language to make the McKay Scholarship accessible to students on 504 Plans. This has allowed many more children access to the McKay Scholarship.

While parents may never know her name, or know what she has done for countless children throughout Florida, we want Dr. Hardman to know that we recognize her service to children with disabilities. We are proud to present her with our Distinguished Service Award.