

My name is Scooter Gene Michael Long and I want you to change the high school graduation policy.

I was sad that I could not walk at graduation with my friends in 2002.

I want you to vote for Scooter's Bill.

SB 673 will let other students do what I could not do.

Vote yes!

Senior ring \$300, Senior portraits \$800, Senior Prom \$500, Graduation invitations, cap & gown \$200. Getting to participate with your peers in the graduation ceremony, if you are in special education. . .**priceless!** The cost of the senior year items came from the May 27, 2006 issue of the *Ft. Worth Star Telegram* and the August 8, 2006 issue of *The Dallas Morning News*.

The source about graduation participation, my son Scooter.

Madame Chair and fellow Senate Education Committee members I am asking for your help in making possible a positive change in the education process for students with disabilities.

S.B. 673, also known as “Scooter’s Bill” authored by Senator Zaffirini, when enacted into law, will require all public schools in Texas to allow their senior students, in special education, to participate with their peers in graduation.

Furthermore, this bill will also allow students in special education to remain eligible for extended services granted to them under the federal laws included in IDEA. To quote Martha Stewart, “This is a good thing.”

*The Education Quarterly*, Volume 5, issue 2 states that in 2002 there were 495,493 students, with an IEP, being educated in Texas public schools. At the time that was roughly 12% of the student population. That number, according to *The National Center on Education*, increases each year. The number of students in Texas this bill impacts is substantial.

I and my family believe strongly that participation in graduation ceremonies should occur at a time when students have class and community connections with friends and peers. Implementing this change won't cost taxpayers a dime. However, failing to enact this legislation will eventually cost money as parents and students subject the remaining hold-out districts to litigation. Revenue neutral legislation, that accomplishes great good when enacted, to quote any elected official, "It's a good thing!"

Many of you perhaps already know the inspiration of this bill. For those who don't, it is the result of a 2002 ruling by the Dallas ISD effectively denying our son, Scooter, from participating with his class even though he was at the end of his formal senior year and had the required credits. Scooter's case made it to the federal court level.

The judge, relying on language in the state education code, denied Scooter this vital rite of passage. Current Texas Education Agency guidelines give all school districts in the state the option of allowing students full participation in graduation ceremonies along with continuing to qualify for special ed. services. It is my belief, and many others in the state that the language be that of "require" not option. The judge stated that the DISD policy was and I quote "Draconian" yet due to the lack of definite "requirement language" in TEA standards he had to rule against based on current state regulations.

Scooter was eligible, according to DISD guidelines, to walk with the class of 2006. However, he knew none of those graduating seniors because they were all in middle school at the time he was a senior.

As you know, if SB 673 makes it out of the Senate and House Education Committees and garners a 2/3 supporting vote on the floor of each chamber it will take effect immediately, thus allowing all 2007 Texas high school seniors in Special Education to walk with their peers and maintain eligibility for services.

With your support, and the support of your colleagues in the Senate and House, we can get S.B. 673 passed this legislative session. Students with special needs deserve experiencing the milestone of graduation with their high school friends and peers, not with strangers years later!

Vote in support of S.B. 673 in committee and  
vote in support on the floor. Help make that  
Priceless experience . . . .become a reality! ,

Senator Zaffirini, thank you, Scooter's Bill "Is a  
good thing!"