

Members of the Committee:

Please support the DDA budget with a restoration of the 2% funding increase that was cut through the BRFA.

When my son moved from his educational program at the Maryland School for the Blind 20 years ago, he received care and support from able, dedicated professionals. In 1999, the salaries for those professional workers was far enough above the minimum wage at that time to support them in their work and lives.

Today, 20 years later, in 2020, these exceptional people must work two jobs for two different agencies to make ends meet. Two agencies are necessary because DDA agencies cannot afford to pay their staff people appropriate wages, much less overtime that sometimes is much needed. Current staff could make more, with less effort, at retail companies, stocking shelves or cooking hamburgers. They are as dedicated and driven to personal service as are our excellent, underpaid teachers and educators.

These staff choose to work with individuals who have physical and mental challenges that make it difficult to live in our society and contribute as they wish to. The staff are so people-oriented that they choose to work two jobs, making it difficult for them to participate in their own family and social lives.

Where would the world be without Helen Keller who had her Annie Sullivan? Or Steven Hawking, who had essential care and support from able and dedicated staff? Outside this hearing room, perhaps just down the street, may be an individual who also could serve and contribute to the world's knowledge and beauty with the appropriate assistance. Is there another Steven Hawking, Van Gogh, the next astrophysicist, philosopher, artist or author sitting or lying in a room in Maryland, who cannot give to the world without assistance? What could my son and his housemates produce if they had staff who were not too exhausted to help them overcome the communication limitations of autism?

I implore you to ensure that the DDA budget includes 4% funding increases for community providers of developmental disabilities services and this funding is provided no later than July 1. This provides the bare minimum that was promised by you, our compassionate legislative body, last year. Our people need even more; but this is a life-saving first step.

I thank you in advance,

Cheryl Geske

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