

Testimony of Joshua Basile
Bill Number: SB959
Position: Favorable

Dear Chairperson Kelley, Finance Committee Members, and Staff:

My name is Josh Basile. I am here today to testify about my disability employment journey, fiscal and policy details surrounding SB 959 and to ask for your support.

In 2004 my life was flipped upside down on an annual family vacation at the beach. I was 18 years old at the time when a wave picked me up and slammed me headfirst against the ocean floor. I shattered the fifth cervical vertebra in my neck and was immediately paralyzed below the shoulders.

Since being paralyzed I've not let my spinal cord injury stop me from dreaming big or wheeling big. Over the last 15 years I went on to graduate cum laude from the University of Maryland College Park, magna cum laude from law school, became barred in both Maryland and Washington DC, and for the last seven years I have worked full-time as a catastrophic injury trial attorney.

Both my employment and my nursing home free community-based journeys were made possible because of Maryland's vocational program called Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) and Maryland's self-directed services through DDA's 1915 C home and community-based waiver programs such as the Community Pathways Waiver. These programs have changed my life and many others like me.

In 2018 I testified in front of this committee regarding SB 660 asking many of you sitting here today to create a demonstration project to allow those with significant disabilities to enroll simultaneously within the Employed Individuals with Disabilities (EID) program and the Rare and Expensive Case Management (REM) program. This committee unanimously pushed the bill forward out of this committee and the governor later signed it into law within Chapter 446 of the Acts of 2018.

SB 660 was an emergency bill to take effect on June 1, 2018 and remain effective for a period of 3 years. Unfortunately, to date, the demonstration project has not serviced one person within the pilot program. SB 959 is requesting to extend the original May 31, 2021 end date to May 31, 2023. The purpose of the demonstration project was to learn from those with significant disabilities that were wishing in 2018 and still wishing in 2020 to simultaneously pursue employment and nursing services through the EID and REM programs. Currently, COMAR regulations block individuals with significant disabilities like myself from enrolling in both programs. You either have to choose to be employed without nursing services, or receive nursing services but forego employment. You cannot have both. This is a very sad and cruel choice to put on anyone especially those with significant disabilities.

I would now like to speak to the fiscal summary note and clarify that SB 959 is not costing Maryland any additional expenses outside of what was originally proposed in 2018. The original pilot program was supposed to be funded for 3 years at \$500,000 per year and as previously mentioned has not served one person to date.

Lastly, SB 959 is adding language to the original demonstration project pilot program to allow for persons currently enrolled in the REM program to also access the EID program simultaneously. This was done because Maryland's Department of Health interpreted the 2018 legislation to only allow those

enrolled in EID to have access to REM services through the pilot, not vice versa. This interpretation would only demonstrate half of the picture and it would prevent Maryland from learning valuable information.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration!

Sincerely,
Josh Basile