

February 10, 2021

Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen St.
Annapolis, MD. 21401

In Support of HB 640 / HB 700: Criminal Law – Failure to Obey a Lawful and Reasonable Order - Public Disturbance – Repeal.

Members of the House Judiciary Committee.

As a parent and advocate for persons with disabilities, and one with a teenager with Autism, I fully support this bill.

I feel that some of the language used within the law was too broadly defined and did not take into account a person with disabilities that may exhibit odd or disruptive behavior. A child is not willfully disregarding the public peace or trying to be disruptive.

My son likes to pace and walk, inside and outside of our home. This is just one of his coping mechanisms. What if some day he encounters a police officer who is not trained in how to deal with an individual with my son's challenges? My son may not respond to the officer in the way he/she expects or maybe he may not understand the officer's questions or commands. Too often these types of interactions end with the injury, arrest, or death of an individual with disabilities. A person whose behavior and reactions the officer did not fully understand before acting to intervene on a call.

As parents and advocates for children with disabilities, we FULLY support any piece of legislation that brings about more equity to the legal system within Maryland. And a bill that helps to increase the equity and equality for black, brown, latin-x persons and all those persons living with disabilities, is a great one.

Options: We can offer expanded mental health services within our communities, more training for officers, and the establishment of crisis intervention teams, fully staffed with mental health specialists ready to act, and deescalate an interaction when called upon. Please help to support all of our citizens including those with disabilities by updating the laws that may impact our community and my son's future.

I ask that you please support House Bill 640.

Thank you for your time and your consideration of my testimony today.

Mr. Richard Ceruolo
Parent and advocate for persons living with disabilities
Parent Advocacy Consortium