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The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
3 East, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

March 2, 2022

**Senate Bill 636 – Maryland Department of Health - Waiver Programs -
Waitlist Reduction (End the Wait Act)- FAVORABLE**

Dear Chair Guzzone, Vice-Chair Rosapepe and members of the committee,

I am writing as the Chief Legal Officer of The Children's Guild to express our strong support of SB636 Waitlist Reduction (End the Wait Act). The Children's Guild is a leading Mid-Atlantic nonprofit organization serving children, families, and child-serving organizations dedicated to transforming the way America cares for and educates its children through education, career services, and behavioral health.

Since our inception in 1953, The Children's Guild has been a leader and pioneer in special education. We have seen firsthand that a lack of needed services has a drastic impact on the entire family, due to the demanding physical, emotional, and financial costs associated with providing for a special needs child without support. Further, we have clear evidence that *early intervention is critical* for these children – yet Maryland's current waitlist for services is a major barrier to providing resources during the most important years of a child's development. By way of example, one child that we serve was waitlisted in preschool, did not become eligible for services until eighth

grade, and is still waiting on services to begin. A 12-year-old child was denied services because questions regarding his independence originally answered at age 5 were no longer accurate. These tremendous gaps in services also deprived families of respite care and the children of after-care opportunities that would assist their development and social skills.

Additionally, even after the wait is over and a child has been accepted to receive services, their services may be minimal due to the limited programs available. This bill will allow more funding for programs offering services and hopefully preventing children from getting off one wait list and then put onto another. Proper funding to provide necessary services for training, after school programs, and transportation are vital to give individuals with special needs opportunities to participate in the community and extra-curricular activities that they may not be able to access through traditional community resources.

Maryland must do better. Reducing the wait for access to needed services is integral to succeeding in taking care of Maryland's children and families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kimberly Neal". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kimberly H. Neal, Esquire
Chief Legal Officer