

Testimony in favor of SB 636  
MDH – Waiver Programs – Waitlist Reduction  
(End the Wait Act)

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Thank you committee members for taking the time to consider this testimony in support of legislation to reduce the waitlist for waivers which support Marylanders with developmental disabilities. Over 9,200 Marylanders are currently waiting for the Community Pathways and Autism waivers alone. The Autism Waiver Registry has a current wait time of 9 years, which has steadily increased over the years. Nine years ago, children who had been on the list for 7 years were finally becoming eligible for services. Now the children wait for at least 9 years. I want to point out what these waivers provide and how receiving services actually impacts people.

The waivers grant access to therapeutic programs, respite, housing, nursing and medical oversight, access to Medicaid, and most importantly direct support professionals who do everything from job coaching, facilitating participation in the community, and supporting daily activities of living. In the simplest terms – there are Marylanders who need direct support in order to eat, bathe, dress, manage medications, access their banks, doctors, churches, schools, community businesses, to gain and maintain a job. When people sit on the waiting list it means no access to these services. It means no direct support. No direct support means we have Marylanders capable of work who are sitting at home unemployed – people with disabilities who can and want to work, and their parents and grandparents who need to work but can't because they are home caring for their loved ones with a disability. No waiver services means Marylanders aren't getting to the doctor. They aren't getting to their places of worship. Marylanders aren't eating at their locally owned restaurants or supporting local shops because they don't have direct support

in getting out of the house safely and participating. They aren't working to support our industries and they aren't spending money in Maryland – and they want to! They simply need support. Direct support is essential for all Marylanders to participate in the economy and culture of our state.

Society tends to have an idea of people with developmental disabilities as being special and cute, even rare. People with developmental disabilities are not novelties or burdens and they certainly aren't rare. We lack exposure to this diverse group of people – largely because they are at home without support services, they are not included in the workforce, and they are still fighting not to be 'othered'. As Maryland residents – legislators, business owners, and neighbors – it is our responsibility to include all Marylanders in our society. People deserve to work. They deserve to be seen and heard and included. Reducing the waitlists gives Marylanders access to our state. Reducing the waitlists is a long term fiscally responsible decision because a diverse workforce is proven to strengthen the market. Reducing the waitlist will allow more Marylanders to enjoy good health, to shop in their neighborhoods, to speak up for themselves, and to be included as part of our great state.

Not working to reduce these waiver waitlists keeps a group of Marylanders hidden, forgotten, and oppressed through lack of access. I believe that we all know creating access and equity for people with disabilities is the right thing to do. Now we take on the task of doing it. I ask each of you to consider how access to waiver services is a human rights issue and one that needs to be addressed immediately. Please give weight to this issue as you consider a supplementary budget as well. Our state can be a leader on this human rights issue.