

March 7, 2022

Senate Finance Committee
Maryland General Assembly
Annapolis, MD

RE: SB868_GablerFamily_fav DDA – Self-Directed Services (Self-Direction Act of 2022)

Dear Respected Committee Members:

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on SB868. We live in Silver Spring, MD and have a 25-year old son, Douglas, who has severe autism and is profoundly nonverbal. He will need supported housing and intensive care for the rest of his life.

Douglas receives Self-Directed Services from the DDA. We strongly support SB868 and the comments provided by the Self-Directed Advocacy Network (SDAN). I would like to provide details on two items that are important for Douglas:

Reinstate Support Broker roles and increase hours available where needed

Under the original conceptualization of Self-Directed Services, Support Brokers were supposed to help participants find appropriate activities in the community, as well as take a lead role in recruiting, hiring, training, and managing staff. Support Brokers were supposed to be active partners for the participant and the family. Under the current system, we have only 4 hours per month of Support Broker services, and the role of the Support Broker has been down-graded to helping out with initial staff hiring and shuffling paperwork; it is a shadow of what it was supposed to be. Douglas needs a strong, well-informed Support Broker to serve as a real partner in setting up his activities and managing the staff who take care of him.

Restore self-directed Awake Overnight Supports

Douglas has severe autism and he is prone to Self-Injurious behaviors (punching himself in the face and biting his hands until they bleed). These are horrible and traumatic behaviors which can erupt at any time of the day or night. For this reason, Douglas needs access to Awake Overnight Support staff – people who are trained in the use of Positive Behavioral Supports to de-escalate and manage this terrible condition.

Please vote to recommend passage of this bill out of committee. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Martha Gabler

Martha Gabler
Mother and Legal Guardian of Douglas Gabler

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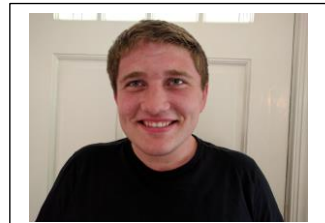


All About Me



My name is Douglas Gabler. I am 25 years old. I have severe autism and am nonverbal. I Self-Direct my Medicaid Waiver Support Services. Because of the severity of my autism, being nonverbal, and having Self-Injurious and repetitive behaviors, I will need 24-hour supervision and care for the rest of my life. I especially need skilled behavioral supports: people who understand Operant Conditioning and Positive Reinforcement. I cannot tell people what is bothering me, or whether I am sick or in pain. The people who take care of me have to learn to read my body language and know how to use intensive positive behavioral supports to help me. For these reasons, I need to Self-Direct my services. Despite the severity of my autism, I love being around people and going

*Choice, Continuity of Services,
and Positive Reinforcement
Matter to Me!*



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Self-Direction is important to me because...

- I can hire the right people to work with me; it takes a special person to cope with a guy like me who screams, bites his hands till they bleed, and punches his head -- seemingly out of the blue.
- I can choose how to spend my days and weekends.
- I can train my staff about the best ways to support my behavioral needs.
- I can make changes to my program and staff.
- I can spend my days doing the physical activities that I love (doing chores at a riding stable, hiking, swimming, boating, and ice skating) and hopefully, being around the people I love, and who accept me -- despite the severe autism.