

Robert Stone, 4415 Highland Ave., Bethesda MD 20814
Testimony to the Senate Finance Committee on SB0868 (Favorable)

I support the Self-Direction Act of 2022 (SB0868) because I am a participant in the DDA's self-directed services option through the Community Pathways waiver. Self-direction is giving me control of my own life and letting me make the choices I want.

I am a 2018 graduate of Walt Whitman High School in Bethesda. When I transitioned, I wanted to be an advocate, a writer, and an artist. None of the traditional programs would let me do all of those things, so I chose self-direction.

It is 2022, and I am now an artist with my own website where I sell prints of my artwork on canvas, on household items like coffee mugs and notebooks. I take art classes at VisArts, at Upcounty Community Resources, and at Montgomery College.

I also write poetry, and am taking private music lessons where I am setting my poems to music. After the pandemic, I hope I can find a place where I can perform them.

I am also interested in music and science, and am taking classes on those subjects.

I am a graduate of Maryland's Partners in Policymaking program, which I took through The Arc of Maryland. I advocate with The Arc, with Little Lobbyists and with the Self-Directed Action Network on disability rights and health care. I've met many Maryland lawmakers, including local, state and federal representatives. They are all very nice.

I am asking you to pass SB0868 because self-direction participants like me need the same guarantees that those who are in traditional services have. We need to know that we will have access to overnight supports when we need them, that we will have access to House Managers when we need them. We need to know that we can always hire our family as staff when needed.

While the DDA has done a good job of meeting my needs, I need to know that I can expect the same access to my services every year, that I will have the same access to funds every year. That as my mom and dad get older, they will know that I can live the same life I'm living now. I need to know that my competency to choose my own path in life will always be respected, and that I will be able to rely on people I choose to assist me with my choices.

The DDA can always change the rules on me. If you pass this legislation, the DDA will not be able to change the rules set out in this bill. These will stay the same. I will know, and my friends will know, and the other kids graduating from high school will know how self-direction works, what they can expect, and that they will be respected.

Thank you.