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House Health and Governmental Operations Committee

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SB 636: Maryland Department of Health - Waiver Programs - Waitlist Reduction Act (End the Wait Act)

Position: Support

The Arc Maryland is the largest statewide advocacy organization dedicated to protecting and advancing the rights and quality of life of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The Arc Maryland supports SB 636, which requires the Department of Health to develop a plan to reduce the waitlists for waiver programs by 50%, and beginning in FY 2024, requires the Governor to include sufficient funds to carry out the plan in the annual budget.

The majority of our members are people with developmental disabilities, parents or family members of people with developmental disabilities, and providers of The Arc across the state who collectively support more than 30% of people with IDD who receive services funded by through the Autism Waiver and the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Administration. Thousands of other Marylanders who access our education, training, and information and referral services want and need services and supports to live, learn, work, and play alongside Marylanders without disabilities, but are waiting in long lines for these services. This impacts the ability of people with disabilities and their families greatly.

Close to 4,000 people are stuck on the Developmental Disabilities Community Pathways Waiting List with some waiting for decades to access needed services. Over 6,000 children and their families are waiting on the Autism Waiver Registry, most for an average of 10 years.

When the Autism Waiver Program was created in 2001 it was intended to be a program of Early Intervention, designed to provide children and families to access services early, thus preventing lifetime reliance on more extensive, and expensive state services and supports. Unfortunately, the funding for this waiver has not kept pace with the need and many who enter the waiver registry as a child wait so long for services that they age out of eligibility before their “number” comes up.

It is clear that Maryland needs to do more, to prioritize the availability of services and supports for Marylanders with disabilities and their families and we believe SB 636 will accomplish that.

The clarifying amendments presented for this bill are reflected in the Senate Bill that passed are important to ensure the plans created by the department examine existing and needed capacity of providers in Maryland, and rates for services to ensure they are sufficient to provide quality services and supports. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the professional caregiver (Direct Support Professional) workforce crisis. Direct support professionals play a critical role in people’s lives and plans for expansion of services must include measures to build the capacity of providers, measures to recruit and retain providers and direct support professionals, and changes to reimbursement rates.

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