

JOSELINE A. PEÑA-MELNYK

Legislative District 21
Prince George's and
Anne Arundel Counties

Chair

Health and Government
Operations Committee

Rules and Executive
Nominations Committee

Legislative Policy Committee



The Maryland House of Delegates

ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Annapolis Office

The Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street, Room 241
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3502 · 301-858-3502
800-492-7122 Ext. 3502
Joseline.Pena.Melnik@house.state.md.us

District Office

P. O. Box 1251
College Park, Maryland 20741-1251

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HB 1149 Medicaid Waiver Programs - Waitlist and Registry Reduction (End the Wait Act)

Testimony of Delegate Joseline A. Peña-Melnik (Favorable with Amendments)

Madam Vice Chair and members of the Health & Government Operations Committee, I am pleased to present House Bill 1149, Medicaid Waiver Programs - Waitlist and Registry Reduction (End the Wait Act).

Last year, we successfully enacted a remarkable and ambitious piece of legislation, the original End the Wait Act. That bill required a plan from the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) to reduce by half the volume of waitlists for eight waiver programs serving our most vulnerable residents. That bill was sweeping in its scope and impact on so many families. MDH developed the plan but families were often unable to find placements due to workforce shortages. HB 1149 modifies the original bill. It will establish stable and consistent funding for these programs and will expand provider capacity. There are two amendments to the bill. These are technical changes to the language regarding the placement of how the funding will be utilized. These changes are important because they allow these programs to be flexible with how the funding is allocated but stay within the limitations of addressing provider capacity.

The waiver programs are overseen by several state agencies including the Maryland Department of Health's Office of Long-Term Services and Supports, Office of Medical Benefits Management, Behavioral Health Administration, Developmental Disabilities Administration

(DDA), and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). These agencies currently lack necessary funding resources to ensure services are available for eligible individuals. Many individuals age out or pass away before they get the resources they need. Reducing the waitlists means more Marylanders get the critical services and support they need to live in their communities.

The disparity in access to services is well-documented. This panel will discuss this in more detail but I would like to emphasize that there is a gap in resources, particularly for our communities of color. Marylanders with disabilities need access to resources that help them succeed. Many of these waiver programs are positioned to provide resources to decrease that gap. HB 1149 is essential to ensuring timely delivery of services. There are long waits from the date individuals get on a waiting list for waiver services to the time they get service. The time it takes for people to receive waiver services after being placed on a waiting list is absurd. This is why we passed HB1403 last year and why I urge this committee to support HB1149 now and 'End the Wait'.