

Good Day,

My name is David Weinberg. I am a parent of a young man with autism who receives DDA Waiver services under the self-directed service model. His name is Harris and he lives in Silver Spring, MD. Harris delights and surprises everyone who takes the time to get to know him - with his humor, knowledge and kindness.

First, thank you for your support of the Self Direction Services program in Maryland. This program enables my son to learn and grow throughout his adult life; without it, I am certain he would regress and have little hope for the future. I do not exaggerate when I say that DDA's SDS program is a lifeline for my son.

I am writing about the changes proposed in the above referenced bill that reverse a major provision of the Self Direction Act of 2022. My understanding is that this proposal allows DDA to cap a line item called Individual and Family Directed Goods and Services (IFDGS). This proposal will be discussed in hearings this week before the Senate's Budget and Taxation Committee and the House Appropriations Committee.

My son uses IFDGS funds for classes in music, fitness and art. These are not just "recreation" or "extracurricular" activities for my son. These are classes that he and his team (of staff and parents) identified because they help him learn and grow socially-- a huge need for a young man with autism. Due to the small class sizes and specialized staff, these activities are expensive, as compared to classes for neuro-typical peers. And, efforts to include my son in neuro-typical settings have been resoundingly unsuccessful, due to his very limited ability to socialize or carry out activities independently. In some months, these classes are the only constant in his schedule, because my son has difficulty finding employment or volunteer jobs that he can carry out successfully. These classes provide desperately needed opportunities to be with other people and to have routine to his life. A cap on IFDGS will limit my son's independence, his ability to be included with others in the community, and ultimately on his health and safety.

Prior to the Self Direction Act, when IFDGS was capped, my son's budget was able to bear only about half of the cost of the services he desired and required. My wife and I are fortunate that we were able to pay the difference. As my wife approaches retirement, this will be more pressing for us. And, more importantly, most self-direction participants do not have family members who are able to financially support them; nor should they have to. Since the changes to waiver resulting from the Act became effective July 1, 2023, my son has been able to access the funds from my DDA approved budget in order to reach the outcomes and goals in his person centered plan.

Please Note: IFDGS spending does not add additional funds to his budget. His team is permitted to reduce other line items (such as staff salaries) in order to fund IFDGS. Although I am writing this letter on my son's behalf because he is unable to communicate adequately in writing, my son understands how important these activities are. Like me, he often

votes for candidates based on his perception of their support for his needs. He has not missed an election since he turned 18.

I have embedded a photo of my son, FYI. Please don't leave him behind!

Sincerely,

David Weinberg

Proud dad to Harris Bouvier-Weinberg

