

8621 Georgia Ave. #616
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

RE: **SB0362/HB0352**

Please remove from this bill any reference to ARTICLE-HEALTH-GENERAL SECTION 7-101 and SECTION 7-409. Leave all the provisions of the Self Direction Act of 2022 (The Act) intact.

I am a parent of a young man with autism who receives DDA Waiver services under the self-directed service model.

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.

For my son, the activities funded with IFDGS are extremely important services that provide him socialization and recreational opportunities that he otherwise would not have access to. He uses IFDGS for classes in music, fitness and art. 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 my son's 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. In all, this cap will have a detrimental effect on 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 husband and I are fortunate that we were able to pay the difference. Now that my husband has retired, 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.

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.

IFDGS funding helps people stay healthy, active, and productively engaged in their communities. IFDGS supports peoples' independence and helps keep them safe. IFDGS Day-to-day administrative supports aim to help sustain peoples' ability to self-direct, even when their parents or siblings are not able to help

Since the changes to waiver resulting from the Act became effective July 1, 2023, I have been able to access the funds from my DDA approved budget in order to reach the outcomes and goals in my person centered plan.

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,

Nicole C. Bouvier
Proud mom to Harris Bouvier-Weinberg

