



3/19/2024

HB 420
Letter of Support

I am Alita-Geri Carter, the Chief Consultant and Founder of Qualequity Access, LLC, a nonpracticing pediatric nurse practitioner and the mother of two medically complex children with invisible disabilities. My older child has multiple diagnoses that have impacted/impact her ability to communicate. My husband and I also had a speech diagnosis that negatively impacted our childhoods.

I am here today to support HB 420 (Education – Playground Accessibility – Communication Boards). I support this bill for the following reasons:

- According to the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, in 2012 approximately 1 in every 12 children ages 3-17 had a diagnosis that was related to voice, speech, language, or swallowing in the preceding 12 months. Of the children with the diagnoses, over one-third had multiple diagnoses¹.
- Contemporary Pediatrics a peer-reviewed scholarly journal reports that there was an 110% for children ages 0 to 12 when compared to pre-pandemic (Fitch, 2023).
- Communication boards help children with communication challenges to communicate with their peers, their teachers, and other adults. Healthline states, “These boards may increase autonomy by allowing users to make decisions about their own lives, as it allows them to communicate their needs (toileting, if they need to see a nurse because they feel sick or hurt, if someone is being mean to them, etc.) to others more effectively”².
- Differently abled Children may have a different experience of going to School or playing outside. When our children leave our homes, their chances of being understood or communicating effectively may substantially decrease. This presents a challenging situation for them, their peers and their teachers, camp counselors, childcare providers, and the list goes on for people who may not understand them or be able to communicate with them.

Their peers may not play with them on the playground, which was our older child’s experience. She has a voice, speech, and communication disorder. The adults acting as childcare providers may not be the child’s primary childcare provider when away from their family at a camp or participating in a community event, which can be frightening and anxiety-provoking to any child with communication challenges or who is pre-verbal.

Our daughter had multiple experiences with her babysitter in Bowie, MD, where she was not understood, and also in summer camps, and this led to her being emotionally distressed during



and after returning from playgrounds from several circumstances that could have been avoided if she had been able to communicate what she needed.

- Children with communication challenges need the ability and the opportunity to socialize and play with their peers as much as their counterparts do but this need is often overlooked. There can be a lack of responsiveness to the situation. Such negative experiences can negatively impact a child's self-esteem, ability to trust, dignity, and mental health.

It is for the previously mentioned reasons that I ask that House Bill 420 receive your support today. Accessibility and inclusion should not be an afterthought when it comes to community planning. Our children matter and they deserve the opportunity to exist in meaningful ways outside of their homes. This could be one of many ways in which the state of Maryland sets the example by using the power of the pen to increase accessibility. Thank you.

Graciously,
Alita-Geri Carter, MSN, RN, CPNP-PC
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University of Maryland Graduate School of Nursing Alumna

References:

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<https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/statistics/quick-statistics-voice-speech-language>

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