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Dear Chairwoman Wells, Vice Chair Kerr , and Honorable Members of the Committee,

Bill: House Bill 262 – State Government – Council for Open Data **Committee:** Government, Labor, and Elections **Position:** FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

I am Alita-Geri Carter, the mother of two disabled children, a pediatric nurse practitioner, and the owner of Qualequity Access, LLC a consultancy grounded in data-driven transformation that advocates for quality, equity, access, and accessibility in healthcare and education. I am writing to share serious concerns regarding House Bill 262. While I understand the desire to streamline the Council for Open Data by reducing its size, the proposed legislation disproportionately eliminates the voices of those most impacted by data policy, specifically the disability community and families navigating special education.

Data is not neutral; it is a tool that can either reveal disparities or hide them. By removing key social service agencies and failing to guarantee seats for community advocates, this bill risks creating a Council that prioritizes technical efficiency over human equity.

To support equity, inclusion, and the rights of students with disabilities, I respectfully request the Committee adopt the following amendments:

Amendment 1: Mandate Community & Special Education Representation

The current bill allocates five seats to the "private, private utility, academic, or nonprofit sectors." In practice, these seats often go to tech vendors or university researchers rather than community advocates. We must ensure the "end-users" of government data have a seat at the table.

Proposed Amendment: Amend § 10-1503(b) to increase the Council membership and explicitly add:

"(6) THREE MEMBERS REPRESENTING COMMUNITY ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS, APPOINTED BY THE GOVERNOR, INCLUDING: (I) AT LEAST TWO MEMBERS WITH SPECIFIC EXPERTISE IN SPECIAL EDUCATION LAW AND DISABILITY RIGHTS."

Rationale: Special education data (IEP compliance, restraint and seclusion, non-public placement) is among the most critical and opaque data the state holds. Parents and advocates need a guaranteed voice to ensure this data is transparent, accurate, and accessible.

Amendment 2: Re-Establish the Department of Disabilities



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The bill removes the Secretary of Disabilities from the Council. This is a step backward for inclusion. Data portals must be accessible to blind and low-vision users from day one, not as an afterthought.

Proposed Amendment: Amend § 10-1503(b) to restore:

"(7) THE SECRETARY OF DISABILITIES OR THEIR DESIGNEE."

Amendment 3: Codify Accessibility Standards (WCAG)

"Open" data is effectively "closed" if the portal interface violates accessibility standards. We cannot rely on good intentions; we need statutory requirements.

Proposed Amendment: Amend § 10-1504(a)(1)(i) to read:

"...procedures, standards, **INCLUDING MANDATORY COMPLIANCE WITH WCAG 2.1 AA OR HIGHER ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS**, and other deliverables for open data..."

Amendment 4: Equity & Algorithmic Bias

The Council must be responsible for ensuring that the data released does not reinforce bias.

Proposed Amendment: Amend § 10-1504(a) to add:

"(10) ESTABLISH STANDARDS TO ENSURE DATA COLLECTION AND PUBLICATION DOES NOT REINFORCE BIAS OR DISCRIMINATION AGAINST PROTECTED CLASSES, INCLUDING INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES."

Conclusion We cannot have an "Open Data" council that closes the door on the community. By adopting these amendments, Maryland can prove that it values not just the quantity of its data, but the equity of its impact.

Recommendation: **Favorable with Amendments**

Respectfully Submitted,

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Resident, Howard County, MD