



MARYLAND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COALITION

Dedicated to the rights and quality of life for people with developmental disabilities in Maryland

House Health and Government Operations Committee House Bill 276: Congregate Care Facilities – Visitation

Position: Support with Amendments

February 2, 2021



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The Maryland Developmental Disabilities (DD) Coalition is comprised of five statewide organizations that are committed to improving the opportunities and outcomes for Marylanders with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD).



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The ability of people with I/DD and other disabilities to visit with their families and close friends while in congregate settings is critical to our mission of ensuring that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) live meaningful and inclusive lives in their communities.



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This mandate includes protecting the ability of the people that the Coalition represents and supports to maintain and develop strong relationships with their natural supports, including close friends and family. From this perspective, the DD Coalition supports HB 276, which requires congregate settings to allow residents’ or patients’ to receive visits from their families. Because a person’s natural supports could include family or close friends, the Coalition recommends that the bill be amended to allow visits from close friends in addition to family, and allow visits when the person chooses to have the visitors.



**Maryland Developmental
Disabilities Council**

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HOW are we recommending this legislation be amended?

- Allow people to choose if they want visitors.
- Remove the word “particular” on page 2, line 25.
- Add “close friends” to the list of allowable visitors, as some people may not have family relationships and may have close friends who they would benefit from seeing.

WHY is this legislation important?

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, many people with disabilities have been prohibited from receiving visits from close family and friends while they are in congregate facilities such as hospitals, nursing facilities, group homes, and assisted living facilities. Some people have also not been able to or have had more limited communication with family and friends through video or audio means. In some cases, this causes people to be lonely, depressed, and have diminished health and to be more vulnerable to abuse and neglect.
- People with disabilities in congregate facilities may already be more isolated from their outside friends and family members and communities by virtue of being in congregate settings.
- Maintaining and developing high quality social and family relationships is associated



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with improved mental health and well being in people with disabilities.¹

WHAT does this legislation do?

- It creates a requirement that congregate care facilities allow residents' or patients' family members to visit them in-person unless the facility staff reasonably believes an in-person visit would endanger others' health and safety.
- It would allow many people with I/DD and other disabilities who live in facilities including hospitals, nursing facilities, other institutions and congregate settings to have visits from their family.

We believe this bill will provide people with I/DD the protections needed to ensure that their social and family relationships and well being can be maintained while they are in congregate settings. For additional information, contact Casey Shea, CaseyS@disabilityrightsmd.org, (443)692-2477.

¹ For example: Tough, H., Siegrist, J. & Fekete, C. Social relationships, mental health and wellbeing in physical disability: a systematic review. *BMC Public Health* 17, 414 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-017-4308-6>.

**Maryland Developmental Disabilities Coalition
REQUESTED AMENDMENTS
HB 276**

Amendment No. 1

On page 2, line 24, after “member”, insert or close friend

Amendment No. 2

On page 2, line 27, strike “.” and insert ; or the patient or resident does not want to see the visitor.

Amendment No. 3

On page 2, line 25, strike “particular”