

**Oral Testimony
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HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE BILL: HB 724: Special Education – Education and Vocational Services – Prolonged School Closure

POSITION: FAVORABLE

It is an honor to present my oral testimony in support of this bill. Thank you to Delegate Guyton for your education and advocacy on behalf of special needs families, and your dedication to supporting us on our sometimes difficult journey.

I am a single mother who works multiple jobs and my son is a special education student with a comprehensive IEP due to his autism, epilepsy, and other disabilities. As of now, he is going to graduate high school in less than four months with a certificate.

From the time he was five until about age 17, he attended a nonpublic special education school. Since then, he and his Baltimore County Public School team worked very hard to successfully transition him from the most restrictive non-residential high school, to attending classes outside of general education and working at a large farm with multiple tasks and responsibilities with his one-on-one aide. Before March 2020, we were talking with that community work experience to increase his work hours; and with another potential community work experience for the other part of the day.

Since March 2020, my son has sat at home in front of a computer, watching videos about different jobs he can consider, listening to a teacher talk about the importance of being respectful and dressing appropriately for a job, and working collaboratively on a resume with

her. This is not what the school's IEP team decided he needs. Rather, IEP and related needs assessment state that he should be out in the community, learning specific job skills. It's hard to learn how to do a job from behind a computer, unless of course you're pursuing an IT career.

Before school closed almost a year ago, my son was in the community learning from his mentors at the farm. He has most likely lost the majority of skills he was using at the farm, and he will not have the ability to re-learn them with an adult service provider in June because job training is not among the responsibilities of adult service providers.

This is a travesty. Drexel University has reported that up to 80 percent of people with autism are unemployed or underemployed, and my son has shown he can work. He wants to work. He tells me consistently that he misses the farm. All of that work he's done, and that the school has done.

Next week, we will participate in an IEP team meeting to talk about how my son's education will end. It is unknown to me if the school system will offer anything close to what my son needs. I know that if I have to retain an attorney to help me fight for it, I will have to find between \$7,500 to \$15,000 as a single parent. It would be so much better if I knew I would have the opportunity to choose if he could continue attending school, receive educational services like job coaching, or join the adult service world, which many recognize as stepping off of a cliff given the dearth of available resources.

I know there are costs involved with this bill, but consider that I do not believe my son needs to be in school all day. And consider that not all parents of students who would qualify for this

would choose to keep their students from transitioning to adult services. As with all of life, the key is to provide options, given individual circumstances.

Please give my son and those like him a chance to have employment prospects by providing him with the extended time for school transition services he needs and deserves. It wasn't his fault the pandemic happened, and he should not be penalized for it by losing his final year in school and potential employment prospects.

Thank you.