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**House Bill 1403 - Maryland Department of Health - Waiver Programs –
Waitlist Reduction (End the Wait Act)**

Testimony of Delegate Joseline A. Peña-Melnyk (FWA)

Chairman Pendergrass and fellow committee members, I am pleased to present House Bill (HB) 1403. This legislation requires the Maryland Department of Health to develop a plan to reduce the waitlists for eight specified waiver programs by 50%. House Bill 1403 will help us End the Wait.

There are eight waivers that must be included in the plan. Three of these are administered by the Developmental Disabilities Administration: Community Pathways; Community Supports; and Family Supports. As of February 2022, the waitlist for these three waivers is approximately 3,600 individuals.¹ The Home and Community Based Options Waiver has over 21,000 people waiting for services.² The Autism Waiver has over 6,000 people on the waitlist as of September 30, 2021.³ These waitlists add up to over 30,000 people waiting for help. 30,000 Marylanders needing services that are being abandoned and neglected. 30,000 loved ones forced to navigate life with serious disabilities and no support.

¹ https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2022RS/fnotes/bil_0003/hb1403.pdf page 2

² https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2022RS/fnotes/bil_0003/hb1403.pdf page 3

³ https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2022RS/fnotes/bil_0003/hb1403.pdf page 3

This bill is critical in addressing the extreme waitlist problem we are currently experiencing. The plan required by this bill must include measures to address current problems leading to the long waitlists. This includes a plan to recruit and retain providers and changes in reimbursement rates for services under the waiver programs. The bill also requires a timeframe to reduce each waitlist for each waiver program by 50% and the projected cost of the measures to be implemented under the plan. Developing these plans will give people on the waitlist hope - hope to End the Wait.

This legislation is critical to ensuring people with disabilities get the services we already have in place in a timely manner. There are long waits from the date an individual gets on a waiting list for waiver services to the time they receive service. The average wait for a person to get on the Autism Waiver is about 10 years. People wait so long on the waitlist; they often age out or no longer qualify for services. These waiver programs are designed to provide people with the support they need. A decade is too long to wait for help.

State funding has been cited by many states as the most important factor for increasing waiver capacity⁴. In some states, explicit support from the state legislature has led to funding increases that helped reduce waiting lists. It is time for us to increase funds.

For these reasons, I urge a favorable report on House Bill 1403.

⁴ <https://www.macpac.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/State-Management-of-Home-and-Community-Based-Services-Waiver-Waiting-Lists.pdf>