



Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
SB 559 – Supported Decision-Making
February 17, 2022
Position: Support

The Honorable Senator Smith, Jr & Senator Waldstreicher
& Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Senators Smith, Jr and Waldstreicher:

I am writing today as the Executive Director of The Parents' Place of MD (www.ppmmd.org) in support of SB 559. The Parents' Place of MD is the statewide Parent Training and Health Information Center for the state of MD. We serve families who have children and youth with disabilities and special healthcare needs with a mission to empower families as advocates and partners in improving education and health outcomes for children with disabilities and special healthcare needs with a commitment to diversity and equity.

Passing Supported Decision Making (SDM) is a critical civil rights issue for people with disabilities—it is about the right to have rights and use those rights to direct their own life with supports from loved ones. Guardianship, while a tool in the toolbox, is incredibly restrictive—it takes away a person's basic rights to direct their life. Imagine not being able to make decisions about where you live, what job you pursue, who you associate with, whether you can vote, what medical care you receive—those are the rights at stake in guardianship, simply because they have a specific diagnosis or IQ. Unfortunately, once under guardianship, it is very difficult to terminate it. We have seen people be denied access to medical records and evaluations that they need to prove their legal capacity and to attorneys who they need to represent them. Often guardianship is permanent

SB 559 is a powerful opportunity that will afford our families who have youth with disabilities the potential to lead lives like their peers without disabilities – *a life they choose for themselves*. Again, thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Rene Averitt-Sanzone
Executive Director