

Supported Decision Making



Supported decision-making (SDM) is a nationally and internationally recognized best practice that helps preserve a person's right to make their own decisions by recognizing that just like people without disabilities, people with disabilities rely on "supporters" the people who they trust to help them make, communicate, and effectuate their decisions.

The Maryland Cross-Disability SDM Coalition, of which The Arc Maryland is a part, consists of 27 partners, including representation from various state agencies, the Judiciary, advocacy groups, self-advocates and family members, and others across the disability and aging communities to help draft a plan to implement SDM in Maryland.

To understand why supported decision-making is so important to people with disabilities you need to understand the problems that result from guardianship.

- Guardianship, while an important tool in the toolbox, is restrictive—it takes away a person's basic right 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.
- Unfortunately, once under guardianship, it is very difficult to terminate it. Often guardianship is permanent.

Passing supported decision-making in Maryland would not be a ground-breaking act. In 2015 the legislature passed a narrow bill recognizing supported decision-making in the context of organ transplants. As of today, 20 jurisdictions in the US have passed laws formally recognizing SDM and over 40 states have introduced legislation.

Passing SDM is a critical civil rights issue for people with disabilities—it is about the right to have rights and use them to direct your own life.

HB529 Sponsored by Delegates Pena–Melnyk, Bagnall, Carey, Love, Saab, Shetty, Terrasa, and Valentino–Smith

SB 559 Sponsored by Senators Waldstreicher, Smith, Lee, Hettleman, Zucker, and Guzzone



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