



*Supporting and assisting people  
on the Eastern Shore with limited  
financial means to legal  
representation and connections  
to community services*

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**BILL NO:** HB529– Estates and Trusts Supported Decision Making  
**COMMITTEE:** Judiciary  
**FROM:** Mid-Shore Pro Bono, Inc.  
**POSITION:** SUPPORT

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Mid-Shore Pro Bono (MSPB) recommends a favorable report for HB529. This bill creates an effective solution for people who would benefit from having support in decision making. Allowing people to maintain control over decisions with support ensures higher levels of self-determination and provides a positive alternative to guardianship.

Mid-Shore Pro Bono, Inc. is a Maryland nonprofit that connects people on the Eastern Shore with limited financial means to legal representation and essential community resources. Each year, MSPB helps over 3,000 people in our community access the legal system in times of need. Our network of volunteer lawyers provides free legal services for elder law, family law, landlord/tenant, mortgage foreclosure, and consumer debt. These services help families gain financial and housing stability and create safe, secure home environments for children, which is especially important in times of crisis.

MSPB assists about 500 clients a year with elder law and guardianship issues. Many of our clients are seeking solutions to make sure that their loved ones are properly cared for, or are seeking to plan for their own future to make sure people caring for them can help. Supported decision making provides far greater flexibility and opportunity for self-determination than existing legal frameworks. Our clients need an alternative legal option that empowers people to direct their own lives. Too often, families are forced into a more restrictive legal tool, such as guardianship, than is necessary. As a result, people lose their rights, their voice, and the ability to make their own decisions. For example, one of MSPB's clients was under a guardianship arrangement that prevented her from having a say over her finances. Under this arrangement, she was unable to ensure that some of her limited funds could be used to help with needed personal care items or for transportation to visit her family. In another example, one of MSPB's clients was advised by the child's school to seek guardianship of her young adult son with intellectual disabilities, with no consideration of the impact that a guardianship would have on his legal rights to make decisions about his own life.

HB529 formalizes the nationally and globally recognized best practice of preserving a person's rights to make their own decisions with recognition that people with disabilities, just like those without disabilities, rely on people they trust to help them make, communicate, and implement decisions.

For these reasons, Mid-Shore Pro Bono urges the Committee's support for HB529. If you have any questions regarding our position on this bill, please contact Meredith Lathbury Girard, Esq., executive director, at 410-690-8128 or [mgirard@midshoreprobono.org](mailto:mgirard@midshoreprobono.org).