

Date: March 29, 2023

To: Delegates Atterbeary and Wilson, Wilson, Alston, Bagnall, Bhandari, Cullison, Guzzone, Hill, S. Johnson, Kaiser, Kerr, R. Lewis, Lopez, Martinez, Pena–Melnyk, Rosenberg, Taveras, White, and Woods

From: Katherine Lopez, Bilingual Program Administrator, The Arc Prince George’s County

Subject: SUPPORT HB 1176

Dear Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for HB1176, the Public Safety – Voluntary 9-1-1 Registry for Individuals Needing Special Assistance Act. I believe that this legislation is a critical step towards ensuring the safety and well-being of individuals with disabilities during encounters with first responders.

If this bill were to move forward, individuals with special needs, their parents or guardians, would have the opportunity to register with local jurisdictions or 9-1-1 call centers in order to alert first responders of certain behaviors, diagnoses, or traits that the individual may present during an emergency. This information can be critical in ensuring that first responders can appropriately and safely respond to individuals with disabilities, including those who are deaf or hard of hearing, wheelchair users, or have intellectual or developmental disabilities.

As a disability service professional, I have heard stories of the challenges that people with disabilities and their families face when handling emergencies and interacting with first responders. Some individuals with disabilities qualify for services like DDA, which ensures that they have a designated aid that supports them during the day, while their familial caregivers may be at work. However, many people with a disability do not qualify for DDA. This can be an issue, as the individual with a disability may not be able to recognize and respond appropriately to an emergency, or may not be able to communicate with a first responder. This bill would mitigate the risks faced by people with disabilities during emergencies. First responders would be given the information they need to make sure they know how to effectively communicate and interact with an individual with disabilities.

Additionally, in high-stress situations, for example, individuals with autism may exhibit behaviors that could be misunderstood by first responders. Any bright lights and loud sounds coming from first responder vehicles and equipment could elicit a response from the individual with the disability. The individual could behave in other unexpected ways. If this behavior is unexpected by first responders, it could lead to dangerous or even tragic outcomes. This bill would help mitigate those risks by ensuring that first responders have access to important

information about these individuals. The risk is mitigated when a first responder is able to arrive at their house, recognize the behavior, and respond appropriately.

In summary, I believe that HB1176 is an important step forward in protecting the safety and well-being of people with disabilities in our communities in the state of Maryland. I urge you to support this bill and help ensure that it becomes law.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.