

January 20, 2023

Testimony of Gabriel and Lauren Rose

Parent of Michael Rose, A child that has cerebral palsy and is non-verbal

HB0005 Education – Playground Accessibility – Communication Boards

Chair Delegate Atterbeary and Vice Chair Delegate Washington and distinguished members of the Ways & Means Committee:

My name is Gabriel Rose, and I am a father of 2 wonderful children that attend public school in Talbot County Maryland. My youngest son, Michael, who is eight (8) and attending elementary school, was born with cerebral palsy and has been non-verbal since birth. Through the dedicated work of school staff, therapists, and family members, Michael has been able to communicate with basic signs such as pointing to objects he wants or by touching his ear and nose as signs of “yes” or “no”.

A few years ago, Michael was provided an eye-gaze device to open possibilities for further communication and expand his vocabulary. Eye-gaze control technology allows children and adults with cerebral palsy (as well as a plethora of other disorders) to use movements of their eyes to operate a laptop, computer, or speech-generating device that is preloaded with words or common phrase such as “I’m hungry” or “I need to go to the bathroom.” This device was only possible through insurance and can cost well over \$5,000 if purchased directly.

As this device is intended for classroom use, it does not travel with him on his wheelchair. This leads to time on the playground being a time that he can not effectively communicate with staff or other students what he wants/ feels/ or needs.

The inclusion of a communication board in our public-school playgrounds would open up possibilities of communication and social interaction for children with disabilities, non-verbal children, and young children that are too shy to talk. This communication board would also work to remove the stigma of our children with disabilities as it would promote public awareness of speech-language services and special education services and would be used and available to all our children.

HB0005 would provide the opportunity and tools for all children to communicate during what may be considered the most important social interaction during their school day. This is why I support HB0005 and hope it receives a favorable report.

Thank you for your consideration.

-Gabriel and Lauren Rose