

****Testimony in Support of House Bill 458****

Isabelle Grable
Lead Peer Mentor TerpsEXCEED
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Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Isabelle, and I am a senior at the University of Maryland and a Lead Peer Mentor for TerpsEXCEED]. I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill 458, which authorizes the Governor to include an annual appropriation of \$350,000, beginning in fiscal year 2027, to the University of Maryland, College Park Campus TerpsEXCEED Program. This funding is intended to provide educational and employment opportunities to students with intellectual disabilities.

The TerpsEXCEED Program offers students with intellectual disabilities a unique opportunity to experience college life, gain valuable education, and develop essential employment skills. By supporting this program, we promote inclusivity and provide these students with the tools they need to lead independent and fulfilling lives. I have had the amazing opportunity to get closer to many students.

Specifically, I have gotten close with Precious. She is a freshman, and we got lunch on one of her first days here and became immediate friends. She is a constant joy and can make any bad day good. She is also a go-getter, and TerpsEXCEED has given her the outlet to flourish, and I have had the ability to see it firsthand. A favorite memory I have with her from last semester is when she advocated for herself and interviewed for/ got the executive board role for a club here on campus. Precious embodies what TerpsExceed is about, giving these students a college experience that teaches them real-life skills. There is such a misconception about individuals with disabilities and that they are unable to flourish on their own, and with the addition of this program, I have been able to see all of the students grow, and it has been incredible.

This legislation is critical because it ensures sustainable funding for the TerpsEXCEED Program, allowing it to continue offering services such as academic advising, career development courses, internship and job placement assistance, and connections with state agencies that support individuals with disabilities.

I urge this committee to approve House Bill 458 to secure the future of the TerpsEXCEED Program and the invaluable opportunities it provides to students with intellectual disabilities. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Isabelle Grable