

February 7, 2025

Dear Delegate Wolek,

My name is Julia Kries and I am a sophomore at the University of Maryland, College Park, and a resident of the state of Maryland. These past five months, I have been involved with the TerpsEXCEED program at UMD, and I have found it to be one of the most rewarding and impactful experiences in my college career so far. I would like to provide support for House Bill 458.

TerpsEXCEED is a two year program at the University of Maryland where young adults with intellectual disabilities gain crucial academic, social, and career planning support. This past fall, I became involved with TerpsEXCEED by becoming a “peer mentor” and working towards earning my College Reading and Learning Associate Level 1 Peer Mentoring certification. Peer mentors work with mentees (the TerpsEXCEED students) to assist them with their school work, internships, social events and more. Overall, peer mentors help the mentee develop a sense of belonging in a college community as they learn they have the ability to be just as involved as any other student.

When students with intellectual disabilities are able to learn how to do more things on their own, they become confident in their skills, and their ability to navigate potential situations and their future. Students are also able to improve their self-determination, ability to socialize and form relationships, and life skills when receiving support hours from mentors. Ultimately, young adults with intellectual disabilities have the same or similar aspirations to those without intellectual disabilities; they want to better their future, work towards a career, gain independence, and overall experience new opportunities. TerpsEXCEED is an incredible program that helps provide this opportunity for these young adults.

This spring semester I am currently acting as a “lead peer mentor” and providing more support to a specific “mentee” as I work towards earning my Level 2 Peer Mentoring certification. For the peer mentors, being involved with TerpsEXCEED teaches us valuable communication and problem solving skills and perseverance, while also developing a broader and more complex understanding of intellectual disabilities and the different ways they present themselves. I have loved being able to observe how mentees begin to need less hours of support as they become

confident in their abilities to handle things more independently due to the support they receive from peer mentors and TerpsEXCEED staff. It is incredible the impact that just one semester has on TerpsEXCEED students. I have watched these students become more confident in their abilities to navigate campus, complete their assignments, and build relationships with their mentors and campus community members. I have also really enjoyed simply getting to know them and learning how much being included in the University of Maryland means to them.

Overall, TerpsEXCEED is a life changing experience for both young adults with intellectual disabilities and the peer mentors who have the chance to work with them. I ask that you please support House Bill 458 due to the significant impact the TerpsEXCEED program has on the community.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Julia Kries