

PROTECT & EXPAND DDA SELF-DIRECTED SERVICES



SB0319 Budget Bill **OR** HB0350 Budget Bill
Hearing Date: Fri., Feb. 28, 2025 – 2:30PM

Juana Inés Osorio, Participant

9121 Eton Road, Silver Spring, MD 20901 (District 20)

[pic] Juana at Wheaton Park Stables where she volunteers

Isabel van Isschot, Mother and Person Support Staff

9121 Eton Road, Silver Spring, MD 20901

301-588-2598

isabelvisschot@gmail.com

Our Journey:

Juana is a 30-year-old woman with Down syndrome. Juana also suffers from high levels of anxiety and panic attacks, something that she is learning to manage. She lives with me, Isabel, her 66-year-old mother. I lost my full-time job of 30 years during the COVID pandemic in 2020. Finding myself unemployed at 62, I decided it was time for us to explore self-direction so that we could both have more influence in deciding her future. Before self-directed services, we felt it was harder to set meaningful goals with Juana and create a plan centered around her interests. **Self-directed services have been a game changer for us**, and DDA cuts will impact us tremendously.

Juana’s current *Person-Centered Plan (PCP)*, a set of goals and intentions, is the best she has ever had. For the first time in her life, Juana has a clear understanding of what she does and why she does it — which is very motivating for her! She currently volunteers five days a week at the Wheaton Park Stables Cura Personalis Project ([CPP](#)) where she takes care of horses, cleans the barn, and bonds with other young adults her age. Lowering wages for Juana’s direct person support, who accompanies her at the stables, will mean losing her “BFF”. Direct support staff are an invaluable part of self-directed services because they get to know the individual well and learn to manage their daily behavioral issues. A reduced wage for direct person support staff will mean higher turnover and fewer opportunities for individuals like Juana to create a deeper connection with someone.

Fundamentally, Juana’s daily life will drastically change if cuts are made to the Individual Family Directed Goods and Services (IFDGS) part of the budget. Besides working at the stables, Juana’s IFDGS includes activities like horseback riding, dancing, and playing

the violin. These activities round out her schedule and help Juana feel busy and self-fulfilled.

And Juana's learning doesn't stop once she gets home. As another member of her direct support team, I make sure that Juana learns to participate in responsibilities around the house, including cooking, cleaning, doing the laundry, and grocery shopping. I wouldn't be able to devote the time and energy to do this if it weren't for the stipend that I receive from the Self-Directed Service Model.

Having said all of this, I want to reiterate how life-changing the Self-Directed Model has been for Juana and our family. **Cuts to this budget will mean losing four years of meaningful growth and having to start from zero.**

Our Asks:

- Policy changes to the Self-Directed Service Model should be made with the input of the parents and community involved in the program
- Protect Staff wages and program costs (IFDGS) until an impact study can be completed
- Instead of cutting Self-Directed services, expand this model to new families

Respectfully,

Isabel van Isschot