

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For years, I've advocated for individuals living with autism, ensuring they live in a community that will protect them. But one August, this cause became personal—I became a mother of a child with an autism diagnosis. An autistic child who has been caught up in a travesty of injustice that does not take into account his autism.

Today, I'm living my worst nightmare. My child is suffering because the criminal court system and the jail does not understand autism. It doesn't see the overwhelming weight of sensory overload, the terror of separation, or the devastation of isolation. Instead of support, my child is met with punishment.

The jail is not equipped to deal with my child's disability. Already, the conditions there have required that my child be placed on suicide watch twice. My child has worsened and is not receiving treatment.

At the jail. My Son, Daughter, and My child's Lawyer have all made efforts to deal with this but the jail is simply not equipped to handle it and it is cruel to subject someone with such a disability to such conditions.

Since my child was removed from our home, my world has crumbled. My mind is in constant turmoil. I experience internal earthquakes and volcanoes all day long while drowning in grief. And when I hear my child's voice, their pain is unbearable. Our pleas for answers go unanswered. The criminal procedure keeps failing the basic rights of a person with a disability—again and again.

Despite my suffering, I continue to work, helping individuals with autism find meaningful work. But as I look into their eyes, and conduct our sessions, I see my child and the pain increases forcing me to take several breaks, I wonder—who is showing up for mine?

I will never stop advocating for these adults and families. And today, I ask you to stand with us. To shine a light on this injustice. To take action so no other family endures this agony. Autism cannot be cured—but it can be supported, understood, and met with consideration of the diagnosis with the passing of this Bill.

Please, stand with me. Stand with my child. Stand with every individual who has ever been punished for being born different. Support **HB-703**

**and its requirement that Judges and DISTRICT COURT COMMISSIONERS SHALL CONSIDER ANY DIAGNOSIS FOR THE DEFENDANT OF A DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY OR AN INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY, AS DEFINED IN 7-101 OF THE HEALTH- GENERAL ARTICLE, WHEN MAKING A PRE-TRIAL RELEASE DETERMINATION.**

