

February 10, 2025

Dear Members of the Maryland Senate Budget and Taxation Committee:

I am writing in support of Senate Bill 603
University of Maryland, College Park Campus – TerpsEXCEED Program sponsored by
Senators Zucker, Feldman, Guzzone, Rosapepe, and Waldstreicher

As your constituent living in Rockville, I am writing today to ask you to support college students with disabilities in Maryland and across the country. Inclusive higher education support academic growth, social development, independent living, and career advancement for a population of students who have historically not had that opportunity. I am advocating for the Governor to include in the annual budget bill, beginning in fiscal year 2027, the University of Maryland, College Park Campus TerpsEXCEED (Experiencing College through Education and Employment Discovery) Program to provide educational and employment opportunities to students with intellectual disabilities.

I am a Mom of a 25 year old son with disabilities who wasn't given the opportunity to attend college. He would have benefitted greatly from this experience; learning with others on an inclusive college campus, belonging to a community at an age that is so challenging, and spending a few years maturing and preparing for adulthood. He was sad that his brothers attended college, yet he wasn't afforded the opportunity. He would have loved being a Terp like his Dad, a proud alumni.

Additionally as a person who started a non profit, Main Street Connect, who works with adults with disabilities, I see first-hand how inclusive higher education programs support students to postsecondary career outcomes. TerpsEXCEED, University of Maryland's Inclusive Higher Education Program, offers students valuable learning opportunities, meaningful social engagements, and safe and inclusive environments. TerpsEXCEED also provides students with developing internships and job opportunities on and off campus, gathering supervision feedback, and providing direct employment support. This includes goal setting and career planning for each student in the program, leading to outcomes of employment and financial success to continue after the student graduates. It also trains hundreds of peer mentors in kind problem-solving, relationship building and teamwork development, all skills that lead to outstanding future members of Maryland's workforce.

I urge you to work with your congressional colleagues on the Committee to provide institutional support for TerpsEXCEED, that also will support expansion of this programming across Maryland.

The future of our state and nation relies on an educated, skilled, and caring workforce. I am relying on you to do what is right for Maryland.

With warm regards and much appreciation,

Jillian Copeland

Mom of Nicol, age 25

Founder and Board Chair, Main Street Connect, Rockville, MD

www.mainstreetconnect.org