

Good afternoon,

My name is Shana. I am the sister and legal guardian of my two brothers, Andrew, 43, and Nathan, 34. We live in rural Stockton, Maryland, where services are already limited.

Andrew and Nathan have leukodystrophy, a degenerative brain disease. They have been quadriplegic since birth and require total care for every aspect of daily life.

I am here today fighting two things.

First, the cuts to DDA staff hours and wages specifically impacting clients who receive REM services. These reductions are happening now.

Second, this is before the proposed \$150 million decrease to the DDA budget that the Governor has put forward.

Families like mine are being hit twice.

Reducing hourly rates for DDA staff — particularly for those serving clients connected with REM — is discrimination against some of the most fragile and medically complex individuals in our state. These are individuals who require the highest level of care. Yet their caregivers are being told their work is worth less.

In a rural area like ours, recruiting qualified caregivers is already challenging. Cutting wages now will make it nearly impossible to retain the experienced, compassionate staff my brothers depend on every single day.

A budget number on paper means nothing if the people providing hands-on care cannot afford to stay in these jobs.

I have dedicated my life to ensuring my brothers live in a stable, safe, and healthy home. Despite being medically complex, they have no skin breakdown, no neglect, no instability — because they are cared for properly. Our mother, a registered nurse, devoted her life to them. I am also a nurse. We understand what quality care requires.

Years ago, we tried respite care. My brothers were supposed to stay for two weeks. I brought them home after three days. One hundred and fifty of Andrew's prescribed pain pills were stolen. There was an investigation, but nothing could be proven. That experience broke my trust.

So when group homes are suggested as an alternative, I have to ask: how can I entrust my brothers' lives to a system where oversight can fail?

Andrew and Nathan want to remain in their home — where they are safe, loved, and thriving.

And this issue reaches beyond my family.

The staff who support families like mine are Maryland residents. They are parents, students, and members of our communities. These programs are not just support systems — they are job creators.

Through self-directed services alone, my brothers' care provides employment for eight people. Eight Maryland jobs from one household.

Now consider the more than 4,000 Marylanders who use self-directed services. What happens to their caregivers if wages are cut now — and then the DDA faces a \$150 million decrease on top of that? What happens to those families who rely on that income? What happens to rural communities where these jobs sustain local economies?

If I cannot retain quality staff because wages are reduced, I will be forced to consider alternatives. And institutional placements will cost the state far more than supporting families who are already successfully providing care at home.

These programs are not broken. Families like mine have made them work for years.

This is not just about my brothers.

This is about dignity.

This is about safety.

This is about fairness.

Cutting wages now — before even deeper reductions are considered — destabilizes an already fragile system. It disproportionately harms individuals who are medically complex and those who serve them.

My brothers deserve to remain healthy and happy in their own home. The people who care for them deserve fair wages. And Maryland deserves a system that protects its most vulnerable citizens — not one that weakens it from within.

Thank you