

Testimony in support of
Senate Bill 742, the (Maryland Protecting People with Disabilities Act)

The Hon. Pamela Beidle, chairperson, Antonio Hayes, Vice-Chair, and members of the Senate Finance Committee:

We are testifying today in support of Senate Bill 742.

I am David Wamsley, the Executive Director of Emerge Inc., accompanied by my wife of 50 years, Patrice Wamsley, and the Deputy Executive Director of Emerge, Mr. Brent Jones. I have managed programs for people with developmental disabilities in the state of Maryland for 46 years. Mr. Brent Jones has worked for 30 years in this field. My wife worked as a case manager for people with disabilities for 20 years. Ten years in, she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis and eventually had to retire. The last 30 years have been a journey for us personally. We provide services for people with disabilities, but we also live the challenges of people with disabilities and their caregivers every day. We are fortunate I can still provide the care Pat needs at home without asking for help from DDA, but we may need DDA services ourselves some day.

Maryland's Developmental Disability Administration services have a deserved reputation as one of the preeminent service delivery systems in the country. These services are at risk if we do not fix the current problems, which are as profound as anything we have seen.

Emerge Inc. provides services to over 300 individuals with disabilities for the Department of Health, DDA. Since 2024, 41 people at Emerge have had their funding stopped for a period of time ranging from one month to three years. Seven people's services have been resolved. The other 34 people currently have unresolved problems and Emerge is receiving no funding.

Emerge is celebrating 50 years of service to people with disabilities, and is committed to supporting people in the community for another 50 years in cooperation with the Department. We have continued to support all 34 unfunded individuals. How? We have done fundraising over the years to build a contingency fund, so that when problems arise, we can continue our work without harming the people we support. At the current time, we are owed \$4,370,000 by DDA for unfunded services. We will use our reserves as long as we can, but we cannot sustain services without payment indefinitely. Of the 34 people I noted, 31 of those people have the most severe disabilities, are elderly, and/or have no family, and would die if they were on the

street without services. What happens when our reserves are gone and we can no longer help these people?

The severity of the current problem cannot be overemphasized. Of the 34 people who currently are not receiving services, Emerge is the representative payee for all of these people except one. In this fiduciary arrangement, we receive notices of required information and benefits eligibility. Not one time have we received a written notice of denial of services which would allow us to appeal. The Department has simply disenrolled people from the waiver and or simply stopped payment without notice.

Since 2024, when this current crisis began, we have been working hard to partner with the Eligibility Determination Division of the Department. Our staff would call, or go in person to find out if EDD needed any documents, and we would hand documents to EDD to help resolve issues. We found the individual state employees at EDD to be most helpful, and would tell us if any documentation was needed and how to get it to them. The Department has now stopped our effort. The staff at EDD who process benefits are no longer allowed to talk to us on the phone or in person. We don't know what EDD needs, and they now won't tell us. While the Department may have a good reason for ceasing communication, it is simply compounding problems.

This bill, and the specificity in it, are absolutely needed to avoid a crisis of even greater proportions.

We respectfully ask the committee for a favorable vote on Senate Bill 742.

Thank you

David Wamsley

Patrice Wamsley

Brent Jones