

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB0742
MARYLAND PROTECTING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES ACT**

My daughter and her staff have just lived through the nightmare this bill is intended to prevent. I thank Senator Guzzone and Senator Zucker for introducing it and urge its passing, in the strongest possible terms.

My beautiful, loving daughter is 30, with serious autism and intellectual disability. She receives support through the Self-Directed Services program of the Maryland Medicaid Home and Community Based Services waiver administered by the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA). She has been receiving services continuously through the waiver since she left high school in 2017.

At 8pm on February 5, 2026, without warning, my daughter's support staff received an email from Fello, her Financial Management and Counseling Service (FMCS), a DDA-contractor. The email stated the staff were "temporarily suspended pending eligibility renewal" and must stop work immediately. It further said that even if DDA "reinstated" eligibility to a date prior to the notice, staff would not be paid for any work done during the suspension period.

My daughter and I don't live together, and she has staff with her throughout the day and overnight. I can only conclude that by sending this notice, the Maryland Department of Health (both DDA and the Medicaid) and Fello expected staff to immediately walk out of my daughter's home and leave her alone, unsupported.

I immediately contacted her staff – five women, all people of color, 4 of whom work two jobs to make ends meet --- and asked them to *please* keep working. I told them I would find some way to get them paid. Committed as they are to my daughter and, understandably, needing a paycheck, they agreed.

What happened next was a multiweek odyssey to get this erroneous "ineligibility" and "suspension" reversed and to get my daughter's W paid timely for the work they did while wrongly suspended. I can provide a detailed timeline of all of the calls, emails and other outreach I undertook to try to get this corrected. Suffice it to say the entities involved, including Maryland Medicaid, DDA, Fello, and MMARS (her service coordination agency, also a DDA contractor) were radically unresponsive. Automated phone answering systems gave choices that don't address my questions and have no option to reach a human being. Calling other phone numbers I found by researching agency websites and the Maryland Manual online led to voicemail boxes for people that had left the agency or others that were not even set up. Staff who I was told were "actively working" to resolve the issue turned out to be out of the office for weeks. When I could find an email address for someone, repeated emails with detailed description of the issue and supporting documentation went unanswered and presumably unread. Others who did respond most often said the issue

was not their responsibility and there was nothing they can do to help. What seemed to work is that I finally cornered the Deputy Secretary for Medicaid in person at Developmental Disabilities Day in Annapolis. I showed her my daughter's eligibility documentation and told her about all the emails I sent her and her staff that hadn't been answered.

To be clear:

1. Even though I had submitted all of my daughter's eligibility renewal application materials 10 days prior to her annual renewal deadline, her renewal letter was issued months late for reasons I still don't understand. Throughout these months of waiting, I was told by MMARS, a DDA contractor and her service coordination agency, that there was no problem and my daughter's renewal application was in process.
2. Nearly 3 months after her annual renewal date, my daughter was finally issued a Medicaid eligibility renewal letter **clearly stating she was eligible to receive services continuously since 2017.**
3. Even after this letter was issued, MDH's LTSS computer system continued to show her as ineligible and her staff were prohibited from working.

DDA, Medicaid, MMARS, and Fello appear not to understand or take seriously the human costs of these administrative delays and errors. *Without warning they directed staff to immediately stop working with my daughter, potentially leaving her alone and unattended.* Without warning they immediately terminated wage payments to her staff leaving them without a paycheck. (AND, since their suspension occurred mid-pay period and we were all immediately locked out of Fello's timesheet approval system, staff weren't even paid for time *before the erroneous suspension occurred!*). Why when Medicaid and DDA make an administrative error, my daughter's support staff have to suffer the consequences in delayed and missed paychecks, I will never understand.

Although my daughter receives Self-Directed Services, I have learned errors like this are a huge problem for traditional providers as well. When participants using traditional services are made "ineligible" by an administrative error by MDH, providers often continue to provide services out of deep commitment to their clients and hope things will be settled quickly. My understanding is because of their willingness to continue to serve these vulnerable people erroneously denied services through no fault of their own, they are waiting on millions of dollars in payments from the State.

Please do whatever to pass this bill.

Respectfully submitted, Teresa K. LaMaster, 8710 Cameron Street, Silver Spring, MD