

Dear Members of the Maryland General Assembly,

My name is Michele Steward. I am the mother and advocate of my 36-year-old son, Zachary Steward, who receives services through Maryland's Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA). I respectfully ask you to oppose House Bill 2100.

I cannot understand why the General Assembly found the urgency to reconvene for House Bill 2100 while thousands of Marylanders with developmental disabilities are facing devastating cuts beginning October 1.

Families across this state are living with the consequences of decisions already made by this body, yet instead of returning to address those issues, the General Assembly is returning to redraw congressional districts. I believe that choice speaks volumes about legislative priorities, and it is one that many Maryland families simply cannot understand.

Over the past two years, I have devoted hundreds of hours researching DDA policy, filing Maryland Public Information Act requests, reviewing legislative documents, communicating with CMS, conversing with elected officials, and following the evidence wherever it led. None of that was my job. I did it because my son's future—and the futures of thousands of other Marylanders with developmental disabilities—depended on someone asking hard questions and refusing to stop when the answers didn't make sense.

What troubles me most is not simply what has been uncovered. It is that much of this information has already been placed before members of the General Assembly and has largely been disregarded. **Since the legislative session ended, DDA has acknowledged that it does not possess localized empirical data directly linking family-provided support hours to compromised health or safety outcomes, and CMS has publicly stated that it has not publicly issued any notice indicating Maryland's waiver was at risk because of cost-neutrality concerns.** Those facts deserve your attention because they raise legitimate questions about information relied upon during the legislative session. Your vote was based upon inaccurate information presented by the DDA. The General Assembly has the ability to correct that wrong.

The responsibility for passing legislation does not rest with DDA. It does not rest with parents, caregivers, advocates, or self-advocates who have spent months uncovering and presenting this information. **It rests with the members of the Maryland General Assembly and the voting choices made.** Every legislator took an oath to serve the people of Maryland. That oath carries not only a legal responsibility to make informed decisions, but also a moral responsibility to confront new facts when they emerge. The integrity of the legislative process depends on following the evidence wherever it leads, even when it is uncomfortable and even when it means revisiting a decision that has already been made.

Families should never have had to do this work in the first place. Yet we did because the stakes were too high to simply accept answers that did

not match the facts. We brought forward documentation, public records, and evidence because we believed the truth mattered. I now ask you to demonstrate that it matters to you as well.

If the General Assembly can return to Annapolis for a special session on congressional redistricting, it can also return to address the DDA crisis before October 1. Thousands of Marylanders with developmental disabilities and the families who support them deserve that same sense of urgency.

I respectfully ask you to oppose House Bill 2100 and to demonstrate that the people of Maryland—not politics—remain your highest priority.

Respectfully,

Michele Steward

Parent and Advocate for Zachary Steward

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