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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
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HB 1015 Testimony – Ralph’s Law
February 24, 2026 – Health Committee

Chair Bagnall, Vice Chair Cullison, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on HB 1015, legislation to ensure a streamlined, transparent process for securing developmental disability services for individuals with disabilities who are relocating to Maryland to live with family members.

I introduced this bill after a constituent and her family endured an extraordinarily lengthy, confusing, and inexplicably onerous process to secure community-based services for her brother, Ralph.

What the Bill Does:

1. Declares that an individual shall be eligible to receive services from the Department of Health, Developmental Disabilities Administration if the individual:
 - a. Is a dependent of an immediate family member;
 - b. Received home and community based waiver services or similar services under a similar assistance program in another state for the immediately preceding 10 years;
 - c. Moved to Maryland to live with the immediate family member on the death of incapacitation of the individual’s caretaker in the other state; and
 - d. The immediate family member has resided in Maryland for the immediately preceding 2 years.
2. The Department of Health will:
 - a. Establish an expedited process to determine whether an individual meets the criteria to receive services in Maryland
 - b. Complete the determination within 30 days
3. If an individual is determined to be eligible to receive services, the individual will be:
 - a. Placed in the crisis resolution category; and
 - b. Given access to waiver services through the most appropriate reserve category as determined based on the services the individual received in the individual’s previous state of residence
4. The Department of Health may determine, before an individual establishes residency in Maryland:

- a. Whether an individual is eligible to receive services
- b. The appropriate service category; and
- c. Whether the individual is eligible for crisis resolution services.

While “incapacitation” is not defined in the bill, there are existing definitions in statute that define it to mean that the individual’s caretaker is no longer able to care for the individual. In particular, the definition in *Chapter 24 - Medical Assistance Eligibility* states:

“Incapacitation” means that a parent has a mental or physical defect, illness, or impairment which eliminates the parent's ability to support or care for the child and is expected to last for a period of at least 30 days.

Incapacitation may include mental or physical incapacitation, or both that could limit a person’s ability to care for someone with a developmental disability.

Background and Rationale for the Bill:

Ralph lived in Connecticut with his father, who was his primary caregiver, until his father’s health significantly declined. Recognizing that it was no longer safe for her father to care for him, Ralph’s sister—my constituent, Stefanie Hennes—made the difficult decision to move Ralph to Maryland so he could live with her. Ralph has significant developmental disabilities and has received day services through the Connecticut Department of Developmental Services for nearly two decades.

Understanding that Ralph would require a comparable level of support in Maryland, Stefanie applied for services through the Maryland Department of Health’s Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) in June 2024. What followed was a 19-month ordeal involving repeated denials, shifting requirements, and circular logic that left the family in limbo at a time of crisis.

Here is a brief timeline of what transpired:

- **June 2024:** Stefanie applied for DDA services for Ralph, noting on the application that Ralph met the definition of a resident under the COMAR because she is a MD resident and is his guardian. She included voluminous documentation about her father’s deteriorating health, including a police report from a car accident he could not remember, hospital records, and neurology reports.
- **October 2024:** DDA initially declined to process the application, but after follow-up, determined Ralph was technically eligible for DDA services. Ignoring the documentation provided, DDA placed him in the *Current Request* category, where individuals like Ralph, who are not youth transitioning from school, languish indefinitely on the DDA waiting list because their needs are deemed “non-crisis.”
- Stefanie worked with Ralph’s service coordinator to request that his priority category be elevated to crisis resolution – the only category that results in services for someone like Ralph, but DDA refused to consider Ralph’s father’s health status because he lives in CT
- There WAS no legal basis for this determination. COMAR 10.22.12.07(B)(1)(a)(vi) states that an individual qualifies for Crisis Resolution if they are *“living with a caregiver who is unable to provide adequate care due to the caregiver’s impaired health, which*

may place the applicant at risk of serious physical harm.” The regulation does not require Maryland residency.

- **January 2025:** Stefanie pivoted based on DDA’s position that she needed to show she could not care for Ralph in MD. Ralph’s service coordinator completed a new Priority Category Assessment that focused on the dangers of having Ralph in MD without day services. Stefanie also explained that she and her husband work full-time and cannot supervise Ralph, who requires constant care.
- **February 2025:** DDA requested additional documentation showing Ralph could not be left alone for more than 15 minutes and evidence of self-injury or property destruction.
- Stefanie provided documentation from Ralph’s day program, a detailed assessment of his level of need, and videos documenting aggressive behavior.
- **May 2025:** DDA moved Ralph to the *Crisis Prevention* category with no explanation—another category that does not provide services in a timely fashion.
- **June 2025:** DDA insisted that Crisis Resolution documentation must be specific to a Maryland caregiver, even though Stefanie could not become Ralph’s Maryland caregiver unless services were first approved. DDA invited Stefanie to work with Ralph’s service coordinator to request a priority category upgrade again. Stefanie submitted more documents to DDA, including more videos of Ralph and documents from her employer showing that she could not routinely work from home.
- **August 2025:** DDA again denied Crisis Resolution. Stefanie filed a Medicaid appeal.
- **September 2025:** Ralph’s father suffered a cardiac event and was hospitalized for two days. Stefanie temporarily relocated to Connecticut to care for Ralph.
- **November 2025:** Ralph’s father had a severe reaction to a cardiac drug and was hospitalized for four days. Stefanie again temporarily relocated to Connecticut to care for Ralph.
- **December 2025:** Stefanie’s attorney filed a motion for an expedited hearing. Stefanie then moved Ralph to Maryland.
- Ralph’s service coordinator conducted a home visit and requested Crisis Resolution placement for a third time
- **January 2026:** More than a year and a half after the process began, DDA finally placed Ralph in the Crisis Resolution category.

Stefanie is now working with Ralph’s service coordinator to secure a day program. Ralph must now complete a Person-Centered Plan and receive Medicaid waiver approval before services can begin. While Stefanie is hopeful, this process should never have taken this long, especially for a family acting responsibly to protect a vulnerable loved one.

HB 1015 ensures that no other family endures this experience.

Families should not have to gamble with a loved one’s safety to find out whether help will be available. HB 1015 brings clarity, fairness, and humanity to a system that currently lacks all three.

Thank you for your consideration, and I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB 1015.