

WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF

HOUSE BILL 1445

Maryland Protecting People With Disabilities Act

Maryland Medical Assistance Program and Developmental Disabilities Administration – Home- and Community-Based Services Eligibility Determinations

House Committee on Health

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Shalanda Pinder. I am a proud member of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc., Alpha Alpha Sigma Alumnae Chapter in Baltimore, Maryland, and I serve as a Program Analyst for the federal government. Most importantly, I am the mother of a 17-year-old son, Ryan, who has disabilities.

Ryan was born with Leber Congenital Amaurosis, a rare retinal disease that causes severe vision loss, and he is also diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. He was diagnosed at just 9 months old. At that time, programs like Medicaid and Home- and Community-Based Services (HCBS) were essential in helping me navigate the complex system to get him the support he needed. These programs allowed access to specialized eye specialists and even to research hospitals outside Maryland, such as the Children's Hospital of Pennsylvania, ensuring Ryan received cutting-edge care and therapies.

Programs like these remain critical today. House Bill 1445 is vital because it protects individuals with disabilities from losing services due to paperwork issues, missing documentation, or administrative delays that are often outside a family's control. Stability in services is essential; interruptions can disrupt progress, learning, and independence that take years to achieve. This bill ensures services continue while eligibility issues are resolved and that individuals are not unfairly disenrolled due to procedural errors.

I speak today not only as a mother, but as a member of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc., an organization founded on November 12, 1922, at Butler University with a mission to enhance the quality of life for women and their families in the United States and globally through community service, civil, and social action. Our sorority motto, "Greater Service, Greater Progress," reflects a century-long commitment to the most vulnerable members of our communities. Since our founding, Sigma Gamma Rho has stood alongside families navigating health, education, and systemic barriers, partnering with

national organizations including the NAACP, the National Urban League, the March of Dimes, and many others to advance health equity and community well-being.

The women of Sigma Gamma Rho know firsthand the challenges that families face when navigating complex systems of care. Our national programs, including Project CRADLE Care, the Women's Wellness Initiative, and Project Reassurance, are grounded in the understanding that administrative barriers and systemic inequities too often stand between families and the services they need and deserve. Many of our members are mothers, caregivers, healthcare professionals, educators, and advocates. We understand what it means to fight for a child's access to services, and we understand the devastating consequences when that access is suddenly interrupted through no fault of the family.

House Bill 1445 reflects the very values that Sigma Gamma Rho has championed for over 100 years. When a child or adult with a disability loses access to home- and community-based services because of a missing signature, incomplete paperwork, or a processing delay caused by the state, that is not just a bureaucratic failure. It is a human one. It can mean losing speech therapy, behavioral support, daily living assistance, and the community connections that form the foundation of a life well-lived. For families like mine, these are not abstract services. They are the difference between progress and regression, between independence and institutionalization.

This bill aligns directly with Sigma Gamma Rho's commitment to civic and social action on behalf of women and families. Our members across Maryland and the nation serve communities where Medicaid and HCBS are lifelines, not luxuries. We urge this Committee to advance House Bill 1445 so that no family is forced to fight administrative battles while simultaneously caring for a loved one with a disability.

As a mother, my hope is simple: that Ryan and children like him can continue to receive the support they need without fear of losing it. This bill gives families like mine the peace of mind to focus on helping our children grow, learn, and thrive. And as a Sigma woman, I believe that when we protect the most vulnerable among us, we all rise together.

I respectfully urge this Committee's favorable vote on House Bill 1445.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Shalanda Pinder

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www.sgrho1922.org