

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Michele Steward, and I am the mother of Zachary Steward, a participant in Maryland's Self-Directed Services program.

I am writing in support of HB 1593 because families in Self-Direction are often required to navigate policies that change without clear notice or written authority.

My son Zach serves as his own Employer of Authority. Recently, our Fiscal Management and Counseling Services provider, Fello, denied reimbursements for vendor payments within his approved budget.

Zach and his employees have now requested a written denial more than five times from both Fello and DDA, asking for the regulatory authority supporting the decision.

To date, no written denial or COMAR citation has been provided, despite DDA being copied on every email.

Instead, we were told the denial is based on Fello's internal policies, and that continuing to pursue reimbursement could risk a "strike" against Zach for not following participant policy.

This situation illustrates the instability families experience when policies shift between DDA guidance, FMS internal rules, and formal regulation. Families are expected to comply with complex Medicaid and COMAR requirements, yet when decisions are made that appear to contradict those rules, transparency can be very difficult to obtain. HB 1593 is an important step toward restoring clarity and stability in the Self-Directed Services system.

Families need clear notice of policy changes and consistent standards so that participants can operate their programs responsibly.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB 1593.

Sincerely,
Michele Steward
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