

**Written Testimony in SUPPORT of HB1445
Before the House Health Committee
March 10, 2026**

Submitted by:
Carole Argo, CEO
National Center on Institutions and Alternatives (NCIA)
Baltimore, MD
cargo@ncianet.org

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

My name is Carole Argo, and I serve as the Chief Executive Officer of the National Center on Institutions and Alternatives (NCIA). I respectfully submit this testimony in strong support of House Bill 1445 — The Maryland Protecting People With Disabilities Act.

NCIA has served Maryland's most vulnerable individuals since 1977, when our organization was founded on a simple but powerful principle: people with disabilities deserve to live safely and with dignity in their communities. Today, NCIA supports more than 300 Marylanders with intellectual and developmental disabilities, many of whom also live with complex behavioral and mental health challenges rooted in years of trauma, institutionalization, neglect, or lack of family support.

For many of the individuals we support:

- NCIA is their only consistent advocate.
- NCIA staff are their family.
- There is no alternative placement if services are disrupted.

This is why the protections in HB 1445 are not administrative adjustments — they are essential safeguards for human lives.

The Problem: HB 1445 Addresses Is Real — and It Is Happening Now

NCIA is currently supporting 11 individuals who have fallen out of the Medicaid waiver due to administrative failures, not because they are ineligible for services.

These individuals continue to live in their homes and receive services from NCIA because we will never abandon someone simply because a government system has failed them.

However, the financial consequences of these failures have been severe.

As of today:

- NCIA is owed \$2,504,441 for services already delivered

7130 Rutherford Road
Baltimore, Maryland
21244

443.780.1300 phone
410.265.7143 fax

www.ncianet.org

Founders
Herbert J. Hoelter
(1950-2024)
Dr. Jerome G. Miller
(1931-2015)

NCIA SERVICES:

Business Services

Community Living

Day and Community
Based Services

Vocational Training
Centers

Youth In Transition
School

- The amount grows by approximately \$115,000 every month these individuals remain out of the waiver

These situations did not occur because individuals failed to comply with program requirements.

Instead, they occurred due to systemic administrative failures, including:

- Waiver redetermination packets that were submitted but never processed
- Individuals never being notified of redetermination deadlines
- Applications sitting unreviewed for over two years
- Providers receiving no responses from Eligibility Determination Division (EDD) staff
- LTSS system errors preventing providers from billing for services

In one particularly troubling case, NCIA has supported an individual for more than two years without payment due to a system error that prevented billing after the LTSS system launch in March 2023.

Despite repeated outreach to DDA and EDD leadership, the issue remains unresolved. This is not an isolated incident. It reflects a pattern of procedural disenrollments and delayed eligibility determinations that HB 1445 seeks to address.

When Administrative Errors Happen, People With Disabilities Pay the Price

Eligibility determinations are often treated as technical administrative processes. But for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, they determine something much more fundamental:

Whether a person keeps the services they need to live safely in their community.

Many individuals served through the Developmental Disabilities Administration rely on:

- 24-hour residential supports
- 1:1 staffing
- clinical behavioral interventions
- structured living environments

Losing eligibility — even temporarily — can mean:

- loss of housing
- loss of behavioral supports
- disruption of medical care
- crisis placement or hospitalization
- or even institutionalization

HB 1445 recognizes that procedural disenrollment should never determine whether a person with disabilities continues receiving life-sustaining services.

The bill requires the state to ensure:

- timely eligibility determinations
- protection against procedural disenrollment
- continued services while appeals are pending
- retroactive reinstatement when state errors occur

These provisions reflect the fundamental promise of the Olmstead decision — that people with disabilities have the right to live in the most integrated community setting possible.

Providers Are Carrying the Burden of System Failures

Community providers like NCIA are currently absorbing the consequences of administrative breakdowns.

We continue to support individuals because there is simply nowhere else for them to go.

But when providers must carry millions of dollars in uncompensated services, the long-term sustainability of the entire system is placed at risk.

If this pattern continues, Maryland risks losing the very provider network that makes community living possible.

HB 1445 helps restore balance by ensuring that providers and individuals are not punished for administrative failures outside their control.

Maryland Has Been a National Leader — This Bill Helps Preserve That Legacy

Maryland has long been recognized as a national leader in moving away from institutions and toward community-based supports for people with disabilities.

That progress was built over decades of bipartisan commitment to dignity, inclusion, and civil rights.

HB 1445 helps ensure that this progress is not undermined by procedural barriers or administrative delays.

This bill promotes:

- fairness
- transparency
- accountability
- continuity of care

Most importantly, it protects individuals from losing services because of paperwork errors, delayed processing, or system failures.

Our Commitment

NCIA will continue to stand by the people we support — even when systems fail. We will never move someone out of their home because an administrative process breaks down.

But we cannot continue to carry these burdens alone.

The safeguards in HB 1445 are necessary to ensure that Maryland's disability service system works as intended — for the people it was designed to protect.

Conclusion

HB 1445 ensures that individuals with disabilities do not lose critical services due to administrative errors or delays beyond their control.

It protects continuity of care, strengthens due process, and reinforces Maryland's commitment to community-based supports.

For the individuals we serve — many of whom have no family advocates — these protections are essential.

On behalf of the National Center on Institutions and Alternatives and the hundreds of Marylanders we support, I respectfully urge the committee to **issue a favorable report on House Bill 1445.**

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,



Carole Argo
President & CEO
National Center on Institutions and Alternatives