

Written Testimony in Support of House Bill 1593
Developmental Disabilities Administration – Self-Directed Services Manual – Public
Comment
House Health and Government Operations Committee
March 13, 2026

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Krista Ennis. I am a CPA specializing in taxation, and I am the mother and employee of my 24-year-old son, who participates in Maryland’s Self-Directed Services (SDS) program through the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA). I previously submitted testimony on February 24 in support of the Senate crossfile, and I am writing again because events since that time have only reinforced the urgency of this legislation.

As a CPA, I have been trained to operate in environments that change quickly. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the accounting profession faced constant upheaval—shifting tax deadlines, new federal programs like the Employee Retention Credit and Payroll Protection Program, and evolving guidance that had to be understood and implemented almost immediately to help our struggling clients. My profession taught me how to pivot on a dime.

When my son began self-directing his services three years ago, the first year felt like a honeymoon period. I worked to recruit, hire, and train his staff, contract with vendors, and build systems with the Fiscal Management Agency so payroll and compliance would run smoothly. My goal was to create a stable support system that would allow my son to live safely and meaningfully in his community.

That stability has been repeatedly disrupted by abrupt policy changes.

Over the past 15 months alone, the SDS community has experienced a series of significant changes issued with little notice:

- **October 24, 2024:** A new Self-Directed Services Manual was released with only **14 days’ notice** before implementation.
- **Late April 2025:** After legislators restored most of the SDS budget, another manual was released effective **May 9, 2025**, including wage decreases that affected our ability to retain qualified staff.
- **June 9, 2025:** DDA proposed a waiver amendment with a **30-day public comment period**. Families submitted comments in good faith, yet the final outcome reflected little of that input.
- **September 21, 2025:** Another manual was released effective **October 7, 2025**, eliminating Day-to-Day Administration services—supports that the legislature had previously recognized as essential.

- **February 4, 2026:** DDA sent an email stating “Partnership is at the heart of this work,” while quietly linking policy updates that had already taken effect **the day before families were notified.**

Unfortunately, the pattern has continued even after Senate testimony began on this legislation.

On **March 2, 2026**, DDA released yet another **Waiver Amendment to the Community Pathways Waiver**, giving families **30 days to comment before submission to CMS**. At the same time, families are experiencing additional administrative barriers: plans are being denied without meaningful explanation, often with vague statements that they are “not cost effective.”

In my own case, health benefits for my employees have recently been denied based on specifications that do not appear anywhere in the current Self-Directed Services Manual. The only logical conclusion is that another policy change may already be coming—before families even understand the rules we are currently expected to follow.

This constant uncertainty is exhausting.

Every time a change occurs, families must reassess staffing, budgets, and services while protecting the stability of individuals with disabilities who depend on consistency. These are not minor administrative adjustments. They affect whether people keep the caregivers who know them, trust them, and keep them safe. I am currently trying to recruit weekend employees for my son, and I have no idea what salary to offer, what benefits I can offer. **It destroys the credibility of the Self Direction program as the DDA continues to hollow it out.**

I have professional training that allows me to navigate complex regulatory systems. Even with that background, the pace and unpredictability of these changes has become overwhelming. Families without those resources must be struggling even more.

We are now seeing the consequences: services being reduced, plans denied, and families left without clear explanations or guidance.

Self-direction was created to empower individuals with disabilities and their families. But self-direction cannot function in an environment where policies change without notice, stakeholder input is minimized, and families are left to absorb the consequences.

Senate Bill 583 and House Bill 1593 provide a simple, reasonable safeguard: public notice and a 90-day comment period before changes to the Self-Directed Services Manual can be implemented. This does not prevent the DDA from making necessary updates. It simply ensures transparency, stability, and meaningful partnership with the people whose lives are directly affected.

Right now, many families no longer feel like partners in this system. They feel like they are constantly bracing for the next sudden change.

Governor Moore frequently reminds Marylanders that “no one will be left behind.” Yet year after year, individuals with developmental disabilities are experiencing cuts, sudden policy shifts, and the loss of services that allow them to live safely and with dignity. If Maryland truly believes no one should be left behind, then families caring for our most vulnerable citizens must be given transparency, stability, and a meaningful voice. House Bill 1593 helps ensure that happens.

I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 1593.

Sincerely,
Krista Ennis
Parent