

Dear House Health and Government Operations Committee,

I am writing today express my strong support Delegate Guyton's efforts through HB 847. I want to share why this bill is so important. To do so, I will share a snapshot of my life and experiences in raising my 9-year-old son with autism. I would love to be with you today, however, a family related matter this morning is preventing me from doing so. This fact itself demonstrates the reason HB847 is so important. Families with loved ones on the spectrum are in desperate need of support so we can advance our children's developmental progress. This will allow us to take part in healthy daily life and enable our participation in community activity.

My son has moderately severe autism. He requires continuous one-to-one supervision at both home and school to ensure he does not harm himself or others. At school, he has an adult by his side across all activities. At home, due to lack of in-home support services, either my husband or I must set aside household tasks and obligations to sit within the room he is in to ensure safety. I cannot tell you the degree of compromise and hardship this creates for our family. Things such as; using the bathroom, meal preparation, helping the other children with homework or doing laundry, are not achievable if both parents are not present. Behavioral management and safety needs of my autistic son override all other needs within the home and family.

My family no longer participates together in group outings, celebrations or even attending Sunday church services as there are no community resources available to support our son's needs. In all "out of the home" tasks or events, one whole parent must separate from the family to oversee our son's every move. As a result, we have become isolated and withdrawn to avoid the overwhelming stresses an outing brings. As he is aging, my family is finding it increasingly difficult to achieve even basic provision. Either my husband or I must routinely sacrifice a fulltime work schedule as a result of the many school "half days", days off, late arriving buses for school (sometimes the bus never comes at all!). For us both to attend work one these days, or to support us on outings we must search for a trained specialist at the cost of \$20.00 (or more) an hour. It is very difficult to find this level of help and even when we do, the high hourly cost is prohibitive in nearly all cases except those that are most imperative.

My husband and I have spent countless hours on the phone seeking help. Some days, one of us can spend up to 8 hours in a day reaching out across an endless trail of "recommended" contacts trying to find programs or resources that can offer our child and family help. My child desperately needs

specialized medical care, in-home occupational and behavioral therapies and most of all, respite services so that all of us are all able to access support and establish a level of life quality. Sadly, because of the extensive waiting list for the autism waiver (at least a 10-year wait) and the cost-prohibitive limitations on accessing quality health insurance, our family has essentially no access to care. A centralized resource is desperately needed that I can utilize to guide and ensure the contact points my husband and I are making are worth our efforts and time.

I am very thankful for Delegate Guyton's listening ear, compassion and efforts. I know many families who experience similar circumstances and we all need the help HB 847 is working to foster. I thank you for your time and attention in reviewing my testimony and I ask for your support of HB 847.

Sincerely,

Nicole Landers