

Testimony of Lisa Wiederlight, M.P.P.
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Maryland House of Delegates
Committee on Health and Government Operations

Good afternoon. My name is Lisa Wiederlight. I am a mother of young adult with autism, ADHD, epilepsy, developmental coordination disorder, colitis, and dyspraxia. Until last month, I served five years as executive director of a national autism organization, and now I am responsible for evaluating and reporting on the performance of multi-agency drug policy initiatives. I have also served a U.S. Senator on Capitol Hill, and in the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy.

I support HB 847 because it is good public policy. It provides an accountable, inclusive, and effective means to improve the safety, health, and independence of people with autism and their caregivers. It provides a point person on autism, a forum for regular feedback and input from stakeholders, and a strategy that can be evaluated with performance measures.

Autism is the fastest-growing developmental disability. From personal experience I know that our families are suffering because state agencies and many service

organizations are failing us. I am waiting almost three weeks now for the Department of Health to approve a service provider change on my son's service plan for the Community First Choice waiver. All the Department of Health needs to do is check a box. But I am waiting three weeks. Why? The system, which is broken, must be fixed by someone appointed to find what's broken and fix it.

You may have noticed I listed multiple disabilities in addition to autism for my son. He is not alone. A 2018 study published in the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* found of nearly 800 four-year olds with autism, and over 1,000 eight-year olds with autism that over 95 percent have at least one co-occurring condition with their autism, including ADHD, gastrointestinal disease, and epilepsy, among at least 15 others. The study also found that about 70 percent of the eight-year olds and half of the four-year olds have four or more co-occurring conditions. Help the autism community, help others with disabilities. A rising tide lifts all boats.

Thank you for your time. I hope you will also support this cost-effective bill that increase the accountability, responsiveness, and effectiveness of Maryland's services to those Marylanders with autism and those who love them.