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We are the parents and guardians of Jack Foster. Jack was diagnosed with autism before he turned two. He has received support from his local school system since he was three, and moved to Montgomery County, in 2006, when he was six. He has only been in self-contained programs in the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) since then, receiving special education that includes supplemental speech therapy, occupational therapy, and other specialized services. He also receives support services through the Autism Waiver. Until the pandemic, Jack had not been without some form of support or therapy for more than about two weeks since he was five. Jack loved staying busy for about 11 hours a day in school and in after-school camps. He was on course to transition to adult services at the end of the 2020-2021 school year.

Jack is completely non-verbal and cannot speak. He depends largely on pictures to communicate. Jack's cognitive ability and adaptive functioning have tested out in the Extremely Low range (two or more standard deviations below average). He requires communication supports such as augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) methods and strategies to be used throughout the day. Jack's delays in all academic areas and expressive and receptive language necessitate the use of assistive technology, visual aids, and a human instructor providing frequent and immediate feedback in order for him to make progress. Jack requires schedules and routines and constant reinforcement of skills or else he loses them.

Despite these challenges, Jack has been an active member of the school community. He was generally a happy and social kid, an active part of his community. He started working outside the school (as part of his school program) the second semester of 9<sup>th</sup> grade, when most students don't start until their 10<sup>th</sup> grade year, because he worked so well within the program. He was on his school's state-championship Allied Bocce team (he won the MVP award that year), and participated in Allied Bocce and Allied Softball every season since his freshman year in high school. He was on the honor roll and participated in the Best Buddies program. He loved puzzles, and usually completed two 1000-piece puzzles a week in his spare time.

Since MCPS shut down on March 13, 2020, over 10 months ago, Jack has had extremely limited support, almost all of it from one or the other of his parents. He has been unable to participate meaningfully in virtual education. His skills have regressed, he's exhibiting signs of clinical depression, and he is, by turns, aggressive, lethargic, agitated, and withdrawn, a stark contrast to his previous energetic, outgoing self. Jack is now constantly anxious and agitated. He has lost 20 pounds and then gained 30 pounds in the last 10 months. He doesn't sleep well, although he spends most of his time in his bedroom. He has panic attacks several times a day that leave him exhausted and frustrated. When he has briefly engaged in school Zooms, he spends the rest of the day even more depressed and anxious and angry. Simply leaving the house provokes panic attacks; he won't even go to the end of the driveway to get the mail, which used to be one of his daily chores. His

previous medications are no longer therapeutic, and we have been working with his doctors to develop new therapeutic regimes, which are not yet effective. Because he requires constant supervision, one parent had to leave his job to provide day-to-day support for Jack while schools are closed.

Jack's transition to adult services has completely stalled. He will turn 21 on June 2, 2021, meaning that he must exit the school system at the end of the spring semester. In anticipation of this event, we have had to apply to adult care providers whom we have never met in person or visited, when Jack is a non-functional shadow of his former self. Instead of looking forward to numerous possibilities based on his previous competencies and desire to work, we are instead having to look for providers that provide extensive remedial supports. Compounding this is that many of the special education students who were supposed to transition to adult services in 2020 still have not been able to start adult services, and so spaces are limited. Several agencies have told us they are not even accepting applications this year.

COVID-19 has made it impossible for MCPS to provide Jack the free, appropriate public education he is legally entitled to, and we understand that. The vast majority of students in public schools just have to hang on a little longer; they will have the opportunity to take summer school, repeat a grade, make up for any academic deficits they may be left with after a year or more of virtual learning. Jack will not have this chance. He has missed a year of school and, as things stand, will not be allowed to make up that time or to recover the learning he has lost. As a result, he may never regain the functionality he once had, which will cost the state significantly more in the long run – having to provide more extensive services for a much longer time – than to allow him one more year of school. While we have no statistics to offer here, Jack is not the only special education student in this situation. SB 0209 gives Jack and other Transition Year 2021 special education students a chance to recover and transition to far more functional adulthoods. Please support SB 0209.

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