

**Oral Testimony**  
**Presented By Lisa Wiederlight**  
**Lutherville-Timonium, MD 21093**  
**January 27, 2021**

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS BILL: SB  
209:PROLONGED SCHOOL CLOSURE-EXTENSION OF EDUCATION SERVICES**

**POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS**

It is an honor to present oral testimony in support of SB 209, with amendments. I am here to request that you extend appropriate school services to special education students over the age of 17 who have missed valuable time for transition to adulthood training during an extended school closure, such as that caused by the recent pandemic. Please ensure students with special needs who are set to graduate this year will benefit from this legislation.

I am a single mother who works multiple jobs and my son is a special education student with a comprehensive IEP due to his autism, epilepsy, and other disabilities. As he has a one-on-one aide when school is in-person, he has trouble with learning independently. My son is set to graduate high school in four months with a certificate.

From the time he was five until about age 16, he attended a nonpublic special education school. Since then, he and the Baltimore County Public School team worked successfully to transition him from the most restrictive non-residential high school, to attending classes outside of general education and working at a farm with multiple tasks and responsibilities with his aide. Before March 2020, we were talking with that community work experience to increase his work hours; and with another potential community work experience for the other part of the day.

Since March 2020, my son has sat at home in front of a computer, watching videos about different jobs he can consider, listening to a teacher talk about the importance of being respectful and dressing appropriately for a job, and working on a resume. This is not what the IEP team decided he needs. His IEP and needs assessment show that he should be out in the community learning how to do specific job skills.

Before school closed almost a year ago, my son was in the community learning from his mentors at the farm. He has most likely lost the majority of skills he was using at the farm, and he will not have the ability with an adult service provider in June to have more job training because that is not their responsibility.

This is a travesty. Research shows that up to 80 percent of people with autism are unemployed or underemployed and my son has shown he can work. He wants to work. He tells me consistently that he misses the farm. He asked to go there to visit just last week.

Please give him a chance to have employment prospects by providing him with the extended time for school transition services he needs and deserves. It wasn't his fault the pandemic happened, and he should not be penalized for it by losing his final year in school.

Thank you.