

2224 Countryside Drive  
Silver Spring, MD 20905

25 January 2021

Subject: Support for Senate Bill 0209

I support Senate Bill 0209 to require county school boards to extend additional education and services to special education students past their anticipated graduation date as due to the Covid-19 pandemic, online learning has had a detrimental impact on my daughter's education and well-being.

My 19-year-old daughter is enrolled in special education classes at Sherwood High School (SHS) in Sandy Spring and, since Spring 2020, has struggled with virtual learning. The expectation of having to sit in front of a computer screen for the better part of the school day is inherently foreign to her learning style. Some days are harder than others and I get the sense her confidence and self-esteem has taken a collective hit. Pre-pandemic, she enjoyed the structure the school day afforded which cannot possibly be matched with two family members working from home. Now she needs to be cajoled to sit in front of the computer and even then, often flees away from the lessons being presented. This coming from a student who has a long history of eagerly waiting for the school day to begin sporting a great big smile on her face, ready and willing to participate in her studies, learning new skills, going on job sites in school and out in the community and happily interacting with SHS teachers, staff and peers.

My family has been doing our part following federal, state and local government guidelines for social distancing. Given this, as well as the absence of in-person continuity of learning, I am concerned that once it is safe to resume learning in the school building, my daughter has a great deal to relearn in an insufficient amount of time. She will need to become reacquainted with in-person socialization skills; catch up on her core curriculum coursework; relearn employment job skills and learn how to navigate the new normal of being out in the community.

Transitioning youth services have also been negatively impacted with many adult agencies closed preventing parents from touring these facilities with our children. It is in everyone's best interest to ensure the successful transition of special education students into adult services. Students need the opportunity for additional year(s) in a structured school setting to adequately prepare for post-school life and they along with their parents/guardians, need to be able to visit adult agencies in-person to determine which one is the best fit. As such, I prevail upon you to vote in favor of SB 0209.

Respectfully,  
Mary Kathryn Houser