

**Written Testimony Presented By**

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**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 this written testimony in support of SB 209, with amendments that confirm this version to the House version of the bill filed by Delegate Guyton. 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. I request that this legislation be enacted as soon as possible so that it benefits those special education students who are set to graduate this year.

I am a single mother who works multiple jobs. 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 have 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. He was using public transportation to and from the farm with his aide, like others do to get to their work experiences.

Research shows that about 80 percent of people with autism are unemployed or underemployed. The transition services, including the provision of job skills, can change this trajectory for so many, including my son. Excitingly, before March 2020, we were talking with my son's community work experience to increase his work hours because it was going very well, and I have always pictured him working there after graduation. We were also considering another potential community work experience for my son the other part of the school day, where he can learn different job skills.

Since March 2020, my son has sat at home in front of a computer, watching videos with me 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. He has exhibited significant frustration and boredom. He is not getting the employment, life, and social skills the IEP team discussed that he needs to become the most independent adult possible.

What my son has been given this year is not what he needs; and is definitely not what was written and promised in his IEP. He needs to be out in the community learning how to do specific job skills, to practice social skills on the job and in various environments with peers, and to navigate the community successfully.

Before school closed almost a year ago, my son was learning from his mentors at the farm. He has

likely forgotten and possibly lost the 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. My son has shown he can work and made considerable progress in learning how to be successful in the workplace and in the community. He wants to work. He tells me consistently that he misses the farm. He asked to go there to visit just last week. He needs the transition services he lost this year. If this bill does not pass by May, he will be sent to adult service programming without them.

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. Everyone wants to be productive.

I would be remiss if I did not mention a Drexel University study on outcomes for young adults with autism that relate to transition services. It is distressing and eye-opening, please consider reading the executive summary. Among the findings are that:

- Over 60% of young adults on the autism spectrum do not transition into work or continued education within the first two years after leaving high school. (NAIR, 2015)
- These young adults have the highest rates of disconnection (not in work or school) compared to their peers with other types of disabilities. (NAIR, 2015)
- In the first few years following high school, 57% of young adults are focused on a postsecondary education track, while 17% are focused primarily on employment.
- About 29% are continuously or increasingly disconnected from any school and employment. (Wei, 2015)

We can and should do better for Marylanders with special needs. Thank you very much for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Lisa Wiederlight