

Testimony in favor of HB 1403  
MDH – Waiver Programs – Waitlist Reduction (End the Wait Act)

Written and submitted by Meagan Andrade

Resident of district 42A

Mother of 5 including 3 adults with developmental disabilities who live in districts 42A,  
10, and 47A

Workforce Development Specialist at The Arc Baltimore

Thank you, committee members, for taking the time to consider this testimony in support of reducing the wait for waiver services needed by Marylanders with developmental disabilities. Over 25,000 Marylanders are currently on waitlists for home and community based services. The Autism Waiver Registry has a current wait time of 9 years, with more than 6,200 children waiting. When our family moved to Maryland in 2013, I put my son, who was 12, on the list. He turns 21 this month and we were just notified that his turn has come – but he's no longer eligible for the Autism Waiver. In the last nine years, the wait time for the Autism Waiver has increased by two full years.

These waivers grant access to Medicaid, nursing and medical oversight, therapeutic programs, respite, housing, and most importantly, to direct support professionals who provide essential services which include job coaching, facilitating community participation, and supporting activities of daily living. They help people access their banks, doctors, churches, schools, and neighborhoods. In the simplest terms – there are Marylanders with disabilities who need direct support to eat, bathe, dress, manage medications, work, and play. People on the waiting lists are not receiving these supports. There are Marylanders capable of work who are sitting at home unemployed – those with developmental disabilities and those who are caring for their disabled family members. Marylanders aren't getting to their medical appointments, places of worship, or other places in their community. It is essential that Marylanders with developmental disabilities receive the necessary support to participate in the economy and culture of their State.

Society tends to view people with developmental disabilities as *special* or *cute* because we lack exposure to this diverse community – largely because they are at home without support services, excluded from the workforce, and fighting not to be 'othered.' As Maryland residents – legislators, business owners, and neighbors – it is our responsibility to include all Marylanders in our society. Wearing ribbons and observing "awareness" days is only meaningful if we back it up with real action. How can we support our disabled neighbors in living life on their own terms, just as we live ours? The

answer is access – and it starts with waivers. Reducing the waitlists gives more Marylanders with disabilities quality of life by creating access to job opportunities (and a diversified workforce strengthens the market), good health, engagement in their neighborhoods, self-advocacy, and inclusion in our great State.

Not working to reduce these waiver waitlists keeps a group of Marylanders hidden, forgotten, and oppressed through lack of access. We all know access and equity for people with disabilities is right. Now we take on the task of doing it. I ask each of you to consider how access to waiver services is a human rights issue and one that needs to be addressed immediately. Please give weight to this issue as you consider a supplementary budget, which will be needed to end the wait. We have an opportunity to lead the way in disability rights. Let's take it. Thank you.