

**DATE:** Monday, February 7, 2022

**SUBJECT:** House Bill 80: Home- and Community-Based Services Waiver - Participation and Applications

**COMMITTEE:** House Health and Government Operations Committee  
The Honorable Chair, Shane Pendergrass

**POSITION:** **SUPPORT**

Good afternoon, Chair, Vice-Chair, and members of this House Committee!

My name is Tiffanie Love Rivers, and I am here in support of House Bill 80 (Senate Bill 28) on behalf of my mother, Gayle R. Love.

My Mom has cognitive impairment due to dementia, the likely result of a brain aneurysm she had the week I was born, that was also when my Mom, Gayle's, professional career ended. As a result of also caring for my Grandmother before she passed, my Mom has no valuable assets, no long term-care, and no life insurance. I have had to take a FMLA leave from my job for several months, which exhausts in March, to care for my mother's needs full-time.

I bought my home here in Maryland 4 years ago to care for my Mom. I pay all the bills, but I cannot afford to pay for her home care as well. As you might be aware, Prince George's County is the wealthiest Black county in the country, and yet the Medicaid Waiver waitlist is one of the worst in the country! This lack of an effective process affects working families struggling to provide care and the caregiver's ability to pass down assets and generational wealth to their children!

Being proactive, and seeing my Mom's decline, I applied for the Medicaid Waiver option nearly 3 years ago. In 2-1/2 years we have received no correspondence from the state of Maryland, Department of Health (MD DOH), no information regarding the application process, no suggestion that we should update the MD DOH Access Point as she became a level 6 (urgency), and in fact I was never informed that we were placed on a waitlist at all. I thought the questionnaire I completed with Access Point was the application for Medicaid, until this past summer 2021 when I found out we were placed on a wait list. I found out because my mother had a seizure, she now needs continuous care, and supervision as she sometimes wanders out the door on her most confused days. In fact, while waiting to speak and focused on the Senate hearing for this bill, my Mom set off the smoke alarms filing my home with smoke. I inhaled too much smoke and was on my asthma inhaler for the rest of the day. I need help and updated Access Point with her increasing needs during the summer of 2021!

After pressuring the state and a 2-1/2 year wait, we were finally invited to apply in October. The first letter I received from the MD DOH was the invitation to apply and the application, and the second letter I received explaining the process and services was after we applied in October. Isn't that after the fact?

The correspondence also states that the MD DOH has 6 months to process the application. We are beyond the halfway point, but as I've been on FMLA, with my leave running out, there has been no confirmation from the MD DOH that they will meet that 6-month deadline. I am not confident as even my supports planning agency has been unable to find out the status of the application. I am hearing the MD DOH is behind on applications by several months. I run out of FMLA leave time, which protects my employment, 6-weeks before the MD DOH deadline.

At this time, I have contacted the state of Rhode Island, where my daughter lives, and where I might be forced to relocate. The Rhode Island Medicaid office staff are also working from home, however they still have a 24-

hour line where someone picks up the phone. I spoke with them, they do not have this wait list Maryland has and they are processing applications within 30-90 days, sometimes faster! Let me add that there's also a waitlist for quality long-term care nursing facilities, but nursing homes often are not allowing visitors now due to COVID. I do not want to relocate, it will be very disruptive and traumatic to move someone with dementia, but my employer now allows remote work, and my job is in jeopardy. If the state of Maryland had met their obligations in a timely manner, our family would not be in this situation. I've had no help years and we're still waiting.

**Addendum:**

I want to explain the correspondence with Maryland DOH along with the difficult deadlines for caregiving families (who are already overwhelmed):

In October we receive the invitation to apply, and the application as mentioned above. We received this by mail October 13th, it was postmarked oddly on a holiday, October 11th (Columbus/indigenous People's Day). However, it was dated October 5th, with a deadline of 21 days, October 26th (but I only actually had 7 business days, or I lose my spot on the wait list). Also, the deadline didn't say must be postmarked within 21 days, it said received by! Due to anxiety and a desperation for services, I spent 48 hours on this application and mailed it in 2 days on October 15th. Certified mail receipt says they received it October 19th, however, they state the 6-month deadline for them to process the application begins October 29th. I pulled together what became nearly 80 pages of required documentation, no one answers their phones when I had questions, paid for photocopies and certified mail, and they docked me 10 days! Each day without care for my Mom counts!

In November, I received a request for information on November 9th, letter dated November 1st, the deadline was November 11th (again a holiday – Veterans Day!), I had 2 days and couldn't call if I had questions on the holiday. Besides all calls in MD are routed to google voice mail, call back 2 or more days later. Took hours to figure out how to register and submit the documents online via MD MyThink (no instructions were included). I requested my PIN again online but scanning the document at home I missed the deadline by 3 hours, I submitted at 3am! The PIN to access MD MyThink was received the day after the deadline by mail, it was dated November 1st (and still no instructions on how to submit).

In December, just before the cyber-attack, I contacted the Maryland DOH for a status update, and they had no record of their letter sent to me or my response in November. After the cyber-attack the first week of December, none of my calls or an email were returned!

At the end of January, I finally received communication, the Maryland DOH office said they still cannot access to their systems, almost two months since the cyber-attack. I re-submitted paperwork they could not access, they asked me to be patient, but how can I? I need Maryland DOH to meet their deadline as I am running out of FMLA!

Thank you for this opportunity to share my story and I ask that you support House Bill 80.

Sincerely,

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