



**HOUSE BILL 1403**  
**End The Wait Act**  
**March 15, 2022**  
**POSITION: FAVORABLE**

Pathfinders for Autism (PFA) is Maryland's largest autism organization dedicated to helping individuals, parents, and professionals find resources, support, and training while working to increase the awareness of autism spectrum disorders. We accomplish this through a variety of programs and services, all of which are offered FREE of charge. Last year our programs directly served 20,000 Maryland residents.

Thousands of people with developmental disabilities (including autism, cerebral palsy, and Down syndrome) are on a Developmental Disability Administration (DDA) "Waiting List" for vital services and support because of inadequate resources. Children in crisis resolution, crisis prevention and current request categories make up more than half of those on the waiting list.

The Bill requires the DDA to create a long overdue plan to reduce the wait lists for **eight Medicaid Waivers**, including the Autism Waiver, by at least 50%. The plan shall address the growing needs of the developmental disability community and must include strategies for recruiting and retaining providers, reimbursement rates, and related costs in-order-to expand these programs and reduce excess waits for our most vulnerable populations.

The Autism Waiver registry has over 6,000 children awaiting service who, on average, wait more than 8 years before they are even evaluated to receive services. Some even age out of the program before they can access any services.

The Autism Waiver provides specific services to children with autism to support them in their homes and communities. Waiver participants are eligible for a variety of services, such as therapeutic integration services; residential habilitation; respite care; environmental accessibility adaptations; family training; service coordination; Intensive Individual Support Services; and adult life planning. Research supports that early intervention is the key to the success of a child, and dramatically reduces the likelihood that children will need extensive supports as they age.

One in 49 Maryland children are diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD)<sup>1</sup>. There are over 13,400 children in Maryland public schools with an ASD diagnosis<sup>2</sup>. Children with autism grow into adults with autism, many of whom spend a lifetime on waiting lists for Maryland services.

Individuals with autism and other development disabilities have waited long enough. I respectfully urge this committee to vote in favor of HB1403 to End the Wait for thousands of Maryland children and adults with developmental disabilities. For more information, please contact Rebecca Rienzi, Executive Director, Pathfinders for Autism at 443-330-5370, ext. 101 or rrienzi@pfamd.org

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/data.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/DCAA/SSP/20202021Student/2021SpecialEducationCensusData.pdf>