

Testimony  
Senate Budget & Tax Committee  
Regarding  
Victim Services Stabilization Act (SB148)

**Robin C Murphy, Executive Director**

January 25, 2023

Disability Rights Maryland, DRM (formerly known as the Maryland Disability Law Center, MDLC) is Maryland's designated Protection & Advocacy (P&A) agency which is part of a nationwide network of organizations established by Congress to protect and advance the rights of people with disabilities.

DRM's Victims of Abuse with Developmental Disabilities project serves people with developmental disabilities (DD) in urban and rural areas statewide. Virtually all of the clients we serve live in poverty and receive only Social Security Supplemental Income (SSI) benefits or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) income. Due to their disabilities and poverty, people with DD who are victims of crime have limited access to conventional resources for support such as hiring attorneys, contacting victim support services, or otherwise obtaining support to ensure their safety. DRM fills a unique role for these victims.

According to the most recent data from the federal Bureau of Justice Statistics, the overall rate of serious violent crime (rape or sexual assault, robbery and aggravated assault) for persons with disabilities was almost four times the rate for persons without disabilities. People with disabilities were victims of 26% of all nonfatal violent crime, despite accounting for only approximately 12% of the population. And during 2017-2019, people with cognitive disabilities had the highest victimization rate among the disability types measured for total violent crime, serious violent crime, and simple assault. <https://bjs.ojp.gov/library/publications/crime-against-persons-disabilities-2009-2019-statistical-tables>

The federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funding supports two full time DRM experienced advocates with significant expertise in serving survivors of abuse with developmental disabilities (DD). We provide specialized services throughout the state and have developed productive statewide relationships with advocacy organizations, provider agencies and state agencies. And, we also provide legal assistance, advocacy and counseling to victims of crime with developmental disabilities, ensure compliance with federal and state

regulations for client safety and connect survivors to services to address trauma and specialized needs.

Through this work DRM identifies, investigates and advocates to resolve system wide issues in facilities serving people with developmental disabilities as well as victims of abuse and neglect who reside in the community. Over the past year DRM's project has screened 1829 reports of incidents of abuse, neglect, and deaths, performed preliminary follow up in 446 incidents to ensure people were safe from harm, provided advocacy services to 45 individual clients, referred 36 people to the VINE system.

Just one of our recent cases shows how critical the advocacy services we provide are needed to not only benefit the individuals we represent but to also uncover abuse that jeopardizes the safety of people with developmental disabilities living in congregate and institutional settings. "John"<sup>1</sup> a middle-aged man with developmental disabilities lived in a group home funded by the Developmental Disabilities Administration when he came to DRM's attention through the state's system for reporting serious incidents. The report indicated that John was receiving emergency treatment for significant unexplained injuries. DRM learned that John's injuries were multiple and life-threatening. DRM investigated and found multiple indications of abuse and neglect and filed complaints with the Office of Healthcare Quality as well as the Maryland Attorney General's Office. DRM ensured John's safety upon his return home from the hospital. John's injuries, which included traumatic brain injury, had a permanent impact on his mobility and functioning. DRM discovered that the agency failed to follow hospital discharge and rehabilitation orders and advocated successfully for those services as well as revised behavior and individual plans to better meet John's needs.

Without a stable level of VOCA funding DRM would not have the financial resources to continue to staff this project at this level where we have been very effective for the past over six years. There is an ongoing and significant problem with VOCA funding. Each year brings uncertainty as to whether continued funding will be available, if the amount will be sufficient for us to maintain critical services and delays in the application process result in late receipt of notices of grant awards and funding.

DRM appreciates that this committee and the General Assembly prevented further harm to victims during the pandemic and kept funding for services stable. We understand that this bill does not guarantee funding for every program and does not meet every need of every victim of crime. However, it is an important structural improvement that supports essential core services

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<sup>1</sup> The name John is a pseudonym to protect his right to privacy.

for Marylanders experiencing abuse and neglect and creates a strong and equitable safety net across that state.

Although survivors of crime and the organizations that serve them continue to face many challenges SB 148 helps insure that the State of Maryland supports survivors of criminal abuse and neglect.

For these reasons, Disability Rights Maryland requests a favorable report on SB 148.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Please feel free to contact:

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