

## Testimony to Support Bill 10-23, Health - Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Commission

Thank you for letting me speak with you today. My name is Susan Hartung and I am here to express my strong support to establish a Commission on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

I am wearing a lot of hats today. I am a retired special education teacher, today I work with over 100 providers of services for the developmentally disabled in Md. I have served on the Board of Directors for national and international organizations and chaired committees at the state and county level. Most importantly, I am here today as Warren and Emily's mom. Warren is 37 years old and has a developmental disorder called KAT6A that has left him intellectually disabled, non-verbal and with diminished muscle tone. Emily is 33 and is classically autistic. None of this is meant to impress you, but to let you know I do know what I am talking about.

During the last 40 years on this journey in the disability world I have been able to see what can be done when people work together toward common goals. I have seen the satisfaction on an individual's face when they know they have contributed to the community they live in. I have seen parents refuse to leave a program because they had "never seen anyone enjoy spending time with their child before". I have seen parents and professionals bring their voices together to improve policies for those individuals who had no voice. I've seen barriers broken down to ensure that those that needed protection most during a health crisis received it. And all of this has happened here, in Montgomery County.

We have done amazing things but there is much more work to be done.

In Montgomery County there are 42,000 people between the ages of 5-64 with a disability, and 24,000 of them are cognitively disabled.

There has been a 71% increase in special education in our school system in the last 10 years. In the next 6 years there are over 900 students with a disability that will age out of the school system into adult services.

Not only is this population growing, it is aging, and we are not prepared for it. We have early intervention services, transitioning youth services, but what happens when the dd population ages? How are we going to meet their needs as they change? We need to look to providing **supports through the lifespan.**

One of those supports is **housing**. 48% of those with an intellectual disability over the age of 18 live with a family member - what happens when those family members are no longer here to provide a home for them.

**Another support is Employment.** In Montgomery County the unemployment rate is 4.6%. For the DD population it is 84.5% .

**And what about those who aren't even receiving services?** The Waiting List for services in Montgomery County is over 600. These are individuals who have been identified as having a developmental disability but DDA does not have the funding to support them.

**And this number represents those that we know about** For those who do not speak English, or who must work two or three jobs to support their family, finding the resources, and the time, to navigate the system to get the help they need, can be an impossible task.

Montgomery County has always provided for its most vulnerable citizens, but the needs are growing. A Commission dedicated to anticipating the needs of the developmentally disabled, and finding ways to collaborate to meet those needs, means that we can continue to be a community where everyone belongs, are included, and can truly live "their best lives".

Susan Hartung

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