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**TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO BILL 33-23
VOLUNTARY REGISTRY FOR 911 CALLS
SEPTEMBER 12, 2023 PUBLIC HEARING**

My name is Joanna Silver and I am a resident of Silver Spring. While I am a member of a number of organizations that advocate on issues related to policing and legal system reform, I am testifying against Bill 33-23 in my personal capacity as the caregiver, parent, and legal guardian of a 23 year-old young man with a developmental disability.

I know that this bill, and similar efforts at the state level, have been driven in large part by, and have the support of, parents of people with disabilities. I also know that parents of people with developmental and cognitive disabilities have been at the forefront of these movements. For that reason I think it is important for you to hear the voice of one of those parents who holds a different viewpoint.

Because of my volunteer efforts to reduce the harms caused by policing, and because of my more than 20 years of professional work as a public defender, I am acutely aware of what can go wrong between a police officer and any member of the public, but particularly someone with a disability. Based on my personal and professional experience, and my knowledge of the landscape nationally and here in Montgomery County, I have little confidence that information I give the police about my son would be used to protect him from harm. If I knew we had a system in place in which someone other than an armed officer would be coming to my door I might feel differently, but despite ongoing efforts, we don't have that system.

There are so many things wrong with this bill, among them that it entrusts the registry to the Montgomery County Police Department, without providing them with any guidance, without requiring any regulations, and without establishing any oversight mechanisms. I am also troubled by language in the bill that attempts to shield the County from legal liability if information provided in the registry is not used. What is the point of my family providing sensitive information about my son if I cannot hold the County responsible if that information is not relied on, or is used against him?

The concern that information we provide will be used against my son is real for our family because one manifestation of his disability is that he has aggressive behaviors. Because it is difficult for him to communicate effectively when he is anxious and stressed, he can lash out physically. Our behavior plan requires caregivers to respond to this by ignoring the behavior and redirecting him. If I provide this information to the registry, will the police officers who come to my door follow our behavior plan, or will this information cause the officers to be more aggressive themselves?

I know my family can choose not to participate in the registry, but other families with more limited information and a false sense of security should not be placed in the position of providing the government with private information that may not be used as intended, with limited legal recourse if it is not. Police should be able to serve disabled residents of our county in an appropriate way regardless of a registry.

In closing, until we have a system in which police are not the default first responders, until we have significant safeguards in place, and until there is evidence that these registries actually work to reduce harm to disabled people, I urge the Council not to support this bill.