



## Ethiopian Eritrean Special Needs Community(EESNC)

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### **TESTIMONY: Support Respite Care for Immigrant Families FY26 Operating Budget**

To the Members of the FY26 Budget Committee,

On behalf of the Ethiopian and Eritrean Special Needs Community (EESNC), we respectfully urge you to **approve a special appropriation of \$250,000 to the FY26 Operating Budget for the Department of Health and Human Services' Respite Care Program** and increase funding for The Arc of Montgomery County.

EESNC serves Ethiopian, Eritrean, and African immigrant families raising children with autism and developmental disabilities. Most of the families we support are on the Autism Waiver waitlist and do not qualify for DDA waiver services, leaving them with little to no support despite significant caregiving needs.

For our community, The Arc's respite program is a critical lifeline. During summer months, many children receive only half-day school programming, leaving working parents without coverage. Families rely on respite funding for afterschool care and summer programs to keep their children safe and supported while they maintain employment. Unfortunately, demand far exceeds available funding, and many families are turned away.

Increased respite funding will allow parents to remain employed, prevent caregiver burnout, support children's development, and reduce costly family crises. It is a cost-effective investment that strengthens families, supports workforce participation, and promotes equity for immigrant communities who otherwise fall through the cracks.

We urge you to invest in respite care so that all families—regardless of waiver eligibility—have access to the support they need to thrive.

Sincerely,

Azeb Adere

Ethiopian and Eritrean Special Needs Community (EESNC)

[www.eesnc.org](http://www.eesnc.org)