



HOWARD COUNTY AUTISM SOCIETY

February 20, 2018

Good Evening.

My name is Roger Thibaudeau, and I am on the Board of Directors of the Howard County Autism Society. I am here today representing HCAS to speak to CR-23, Commission on Disability Issues - request to study and report.

Howard County has long prided itself on its accessibility for, and inclusiveness of, all residents. There are many examples of efforts by various sectors of the Howard County Government to demonstrate its commitment to the tenet of inclusiveness for those with disabilities. Recent notable examples include:

- The permanent establishment of the Transitioning Students with Disabilities Commission to bring stakeholders together to create a roadmap for improvements in the transition process.
- The development of the new Non-Profit Collaborative center, providing increased coordination across multiple organizations and allowing for improved services for those constituents with multiple and increasingly complex needs.
- The recent creation of an HCPSS Special Education Strategic Plan to address the regression in county special education services and community confidence witnessed over the past few years.
- And the constant, unwavering community support provided by the Therapeutic Recreation and Inclusion Services Team at Howard County Rec and Parks to give those with disabilities opportunities to participate in recreational activities.

As a support and advocacy organization, the Howard County Autism Society is working to improve the lives of, and opportunities for, those with intellectual and developmental disabilities throughout their lifespan. We feel that, while there is a lot to be proud of, there are areas where we as a county can do better to support the disability community. At the top of our list are:

- Staffing shortfalls, and adequate training opportunities for those staff members supporting students who receive special education services.
- The preparedness of our young adults and their families as they transition out of the school system and into the community.
- The considerable lack of meaningful employment opportunities available to those on the autism spectrum.
- A scarcity of person-centered programming for adults with disabilities who need day services.

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- Insufficient viable transportation options that create additional barriers to the social and professional opportunities that may be available for those with disabilities.
- And the significant unmet demand for affordable housing in Howard County for adults with disabilities, which is why HCAS has invested in the creation of the Howard County Autism Task Force to move out on an intergenerational housing concept that would provide opportunities for families, seniors and those with disabilities to come together in a mutual support structure.

These issues aren't unique to Howard County. Many are prevalent throughout the country. But that should not stop us as a community from coming together to figure out what we can do to improve our services to those with disabilities in our county. And that is why HCAS supports Council Resolution #23.

We also believe that if true best practices are to be found through this process, we should reach beyond the county and state to understand success stories employed elsewhere and consider their possible implementation here. We believe the Commission on Disability Issues will need to be provided with the proper resources, and timeline, to study these complex issues so that its recommendations have the necessary research behind them. And, just as importantly, we strongly encourage the Commission to utilize the myriad of non-government support organizations, such as HCAS and our advocacy partners throughout the county, who are living these issues daily and can provide a wealth of information and ideas.

Howard County is a great place to live. The county invests a significant sum; in institutional support, human capital and financial resources; in the disability community, with many positive impacts. However, there are still opportunities to do better and improve inclusion of all residents in all aspects of our community.

We at HCAS would like to thank the members of the County Council and the County Executive for your history of strong support for the disability community. And we look forward to our continued work and partnership with you to improve the lives of those with intellectual and developmental disabilities living in Howard County.

Thank you for your time.



Roger E. Thibaudeau, Jr.
Immediate Past President, Board of Directors
Howard County Autism Society