

Sara Arditti - Testimony Re Susan Garber for Planning Board 6/15/15

I'm here to speak in support of Susan Garber's appointment to the Planning Board. Susan has often spoken in front of this group, occasionally sharing her perspective on bills as a former special educator. However this gives no hint as to how accomplished she was in her career. Let me tell you about some of her many accomplishments that speak to how fortunate Howard County would be to have someone of her caliber willing to serve on the Planning Board.

It was the 19 years "in the trenches", teaching students of all disability types and ages that provided the solid first-hand experience for Ms. Garber to be recruited by Johns Hopkins University's Center for technology in Human Disability. During her decade with JHU she developed and directed a statewide program that led to Maryland being one of the first states to be awarded a Technology-Related Assistance Program Grant. She was the first non-PhD in the Hopkins School of Education to be allowed to develop a proposal for a personnel preparation grant and to direct the innovative program when funded.

Few people would be aware that this humble person was chosen to be one of an 11 member, international board to develop credentialing in the then new field of assistive technology for individuals with disabilities. Imagine the attention to detail and comprehensive understanding of the perspective of other professionals from rehabilitation engineering to occupational, physical, and speech therapies necessary to create criteria and testing questions.

With two advanced degrees from Hopkins and years of pioneering experience in assistive technology it is not surprising that she was invited to speak at the Second Sino-American Symposium on Special Education Technology in Taiwan and was the only participant to present on 3 individual topics.

While at Hopkins she became frustrated with the reality that no matter how many practitioners, parents, and graduate students she could train, the high cost of assistive technologies continued to prevent their purchase and implementation. Therefore she founded and directed a non-profit which created a buying cooperative, based on the combined purchasing power of Maryland's public and private schools. Our own Howard School System saved tens of thousands dollars annually on technology purchases and adapted equipment through AT:LAST, Inc.

It's no wonder that folks from both JHU and the Governor's Office on Disability have called Ms. Garber a visionary. How fortunate that since her retirement Susan has devoted her time to volunteer work and civic activism. Just nine days ago she was recognized by the Corporation for National and Community Service with President Obama's Lifetime Achievement Award for building a stronger nation through volunteer service.

Don't we need a visionary to participate on our Howard Planning Board as we face new opportunities and challenges? Don't we need someone who has dedicated her life to leveling the playing field for ALL people?