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Dear Delegate White,

My name is Melissa Silverman, and I am one of nearly 7,500 Marylanders who have Down syndrome. I live in Owings Mills, Maryland with my parents.

I wanted to take this opportunity to introduce myself to you. I graduated from Franklin High School in 2001, earning an academic diploma. I then went to CCBC in the Single Step Program and earned the 90-hour childcare certification. For the past 18 years I have been working in childcare with children from 2 years old through elementary school age. Presently, I work for Caliday in the before and after school care at Franklin Elementary School.



As a member of the Maryland Down Syndrome Advocacy Coalition and the National Down Syndrome Congress, some of the issues that are most important to me are the ability to make my own choices and have control over what I want to do through the self-direction program. Also, I want affordable housing options and transportation options.



I am writing to ask that you give a favorable report out of committee for HB294 County Boards of Education - Due Process Proceedings for Children With Disabilities - Burden of Proof. This bill would level the playing field for families and students who disagree with their school system about an important decision regarding the placement of their child or special education services their child needs to be successful. This bill will simply require school systems to defend their position first if there is a disagreement about a student's program, placement or services that cannot be settled at the IEP table. Right now, only parents who can afford expensive attorneys and expert witnesses have any chance of winning and even then they hardly ever do. This system isn't fair.

As one of your constituents, I want to thank you for your time and consideration, and for all that you do to improve the lives of individuals with Down syndrome throughout the state of Maryland. We appreciate you!

Sincerely,

Melissa