

**Amanda Morales**

**Testimony to Maryland State Senate Budget & Tax Committee**

**Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act (BRFA) of 2025**

**February 28, 2025**

**Re: Opposition to the elimination of Low-Intensity Support Services from the Developmental Disabilities Administration**

Miles Mahon. Marcel Traore. Fawsan Hassan. Ace.

These are the names of just a few of the children with autism who drowned in the state of Maryland in 2024. Individuals with autism and developmental disabilities are over 150 times more likely to die of drowning than their same aged peers, making drowning the number one cause of death in this population. My daughter Liliana has a dual diagnosis of mosaic Down Syndrome and Autism Spectrum disorder. She currently uses her LISS funds to take swim lessons in order to keep her safe. Last year, those same funds went towards building a fence, so she couldn't elope and fall victim to the water that surrounds us, the Mayo peninsula.

LISS funds do a great many things for our community. For many of you, it's just another line item in a budget that can be cut. And I get it. So let me explain how this is a cost savings instead of an expense. What is the cost to the taxpayers when a child elopes? What is the cost for our first responders, in man hours, salary, fuel expenses? What is the cost to our economy when a parent must take off to bury their child? What is the cost for a grief counselor at their school? While you may say, "Most people would pay for swim lessons for their child, why should the state pay for children with developmental disabilities?" It's been over a year of lessons for my child to be able to swim 5 feet independently. That's on top of the \$150 a week in copays for therapies so that my child can exist in this world that has no consideration for her. That's on top of medication, income loss due to time off for doctors' appointments, and adaptive equipment.

Before I was a social worker and before I was a parent, I was a member of the US Coast Guard. I have been part of a team that has told parents that their child will never come home. That we can't even recover a body to bury. I don't want that to be my child or anyone else's. LISS funding helps to put a dent in some of the costs that come with raising a disabled child in a world that would rather not think of them at all. But I'm here today to say Liliana's name, and to remind you of the countless other families whose voices will not be heard in this chamber today. I hope you, their elected officials, afford families the dignity of providing reasonable assistance in raising our children into adulthood.