

Statement for Disability Town Hall meeting 12/06/10

Thank you Delegates for coming to this Town Hall meeting and for your past support of special education in AA county.

My name is Carolyn Fiume and I am the parent of 2 children in AA county public schools. My 5 year old son Tom is on the autism spectrum. There are 7,881 students who receive special education services in Anne Arundel County so special education programs impact every town and neighborhood in the county.

I. Early childhood intervention

There are 1,600 families in this county whose children receive birth to five special education services. Children from the ages of birth to two years old with delays or disabilities receive these services from the Infants and Toddlers program (ITP) and children from ages three to five receive services from Preschool services, which includes early childhood intervention (ECI) classrooms and community based services. As many parents here tonight will tell you, early childhood intervention services are incredibly effective. When my son Tom started the Infants and Toddlers program in at 2 years old he could only say two words and was limited in his engagement with our family. He spent most of his time screaming to communicate. Today Tom is in a regular kindergarden class, he can say full sentences and participates fully in our family life. This is due to the therapy and training Tom received from the professional and dedicated staff of Infants and Toddlers, ECI and CBS. The positive impact these programs have on thousands of families in the county cannot be overstated.

However, Anne Arundel County has seen a sharp increase in children with delays and disabilities. According to statistics available at the September meeting of the Interagency Coordinating Council, an organization made up of parents, educators, public and private agencies, referrals in the Infants and Toddlers program are up 10% a year. There are over 800 children in ITP, over 400 children in ECI and 303 children in CBS. An important fact to know about the ECI and CBS are the number of children with significant disorders as a percentage of the total population of preschoolers has increased. ECI & CBS see children with more serious profiles than a few years ago. For example, there are far more kids on the autism spectrum in the program than in the past. The frightening thing about these numbers is that the enrollment is spiking even before BRAC has been fully implemented. We are grateful to Delegate Kipkie who sponsored legislation to establish the Autism Commission which is not in session.

Early intervention doesn't just change the life of family like mine- it makes good business and fiscal sense for governments to support it. It is substantially cheaper to pay for early intervention and have some children transition to general education then to pay for remediation when the child is older. Tom has taken small steps on path to self sufficiency. The fact that he can speak and communicate radically changes the path of his life- early childhood intervention is the first step toward sufficient, tax paying adults. In Tom's transition year, 80% of the children in ECI transitioned to general education.

We respectfully request you consider the importance of this programs and rising enrollment in birth to five programs when considering the funding of special education and early invention.

II. Superintendent's budget

Of course after the children reach 5, they enter elementary education and then move on to middle schools and high schools. We encourage you all to support Superintendent Maxwell's budget and encourage your County Council members to do so. This County has tireless and dedicated professionals that work with our children and have a direct impact on their lives. They

are led by the excellent director Ms. Mary Tillar. The services provided by AACPS are vast. Our children are educated in three special centers at Marly Glen, Ruth Eason and Central Special, 17 special intensive needs classrooms and 4 autism classroom settings, co-taught classrooms and in general education settings. Many people work with our children including special educators, speech, occupational and physical therapists, school psychologists, resource teachers, literary specialists and emotional disturbance specialists among others. The goals of special education in AACPS are to maximize achievement, promote skills and knowledge to contribute to society and focus on independence and transition. The system is not perfect, but the students and professional in the this system are making great gains. Any cut in the Superintendent's budget has an impact on the quality and delivery of these services to our children. If you are not sure who your county council member is, please find me after and we can figure out your representative.