

OPENING STATEMENT OF

TIMOTHY SHRIVER, CHAIR

MARYLAND COMMISSION FOR EFFECTIVE INCLUSION OF INDIVIDUALS WITH INTELLECTUAL AND
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

28 OCTOBER 2013

More than 200 years ago, our nation was founded on the simple but transcendent Declaration that all people are created equal. Generations followed our founders seeking new ways to bring that principle to fulfillment. Countries around the world have heard the words and thought and fought and hungered to bring them to life. Millions of human beings who still today suffer the cruel wages of inequality—hunger, sickness, isolation, despair—wonder if their communities, their cities, their nations might someday become places of equality. The eyes of those relegated to the despair of inequality seek out those who have open hearts and a good conscience, hoping that their plight might be answered. Equality and its dividend—justice, dignity and freedom—remain a universal longing, a hope, a dream.

Today, we gather in recognition that here in Maryland, the goals of justice and equality and dignity remain the unfinished business of our own nation and our own state. We are here not to investigate inequality and injustice, but to lead our state closer to equality and justice. We come knowing that the voices of millions are here with us, asking for change. We gather with the painful realization that voices of many are not here because they were silenced by our own neglect. We come not to right one past wrong but rather to prevent every future wrong. We come with gratitude to the many citizens of our state with intellectual and developmental disabilities who have spoken, asked, challenged, and led us to the recognition of the need to do better. We come inspired by them, their families, their friends and the many brave and dedicated law enforcement and first responders of this state who want nothing more than to make our state safe for all, caring for each, just for anyone who needs or seeks the strength of law. We are lucky to be here in service with them and their futures.

I want to extend my thanks to the Governor and the legislature for your confidence in this commission. Similarly, I want to extend my thanks to my fellow commissioners for being willing to serve as voices for more impactful training, for more effective public policy, for more comprehensive strategy for justice. I want to thank all those self-advocates who will be our primary source for expertise in our work. In a special way, I want to thank the Saylor family for supporting our work with a clear focus on the future. Patti Saylor said it best when she told me, “I want you to make sure that what happened to Ethan never happens again to anyone.” That is our charge. We accept it with humility and with a seriousness of purpose drawn from one life taken tragically, one tragedy too many.

So we have much work to do and we begin it with a restless dissatisfaction with the status quo and a firm resolve to change it. We want to make a difference, not a point. Our method will be to learn and to listen and to explore the best practices in the nation before we conclude or recommend. Our attitude is one of respect for the people of law enforcement and their fellow workers in related fields. We are

unanimous in our gratitude for the lifesaving work they do every day and we are joined in respect for all the victims of crime and accident and human error that they work to serve.

Our philosophy will be person-centered. Such a philosophy calls upon us to recognize that people with an intellectual or developmental disability are first and before everything, citizens in full, entitled to their dignity, their rights, a proper respect for their individuality, their equality. The times in which we live are ones of significant social change and progress where people with intellectual and developmental differences are living in communities, living longer, living more productively and yet also living with persistent discrimination that is often unnoticed and unaddressed. Our mission is to chart a new way forward for them, recognizing their unique needs and gifts and similarly aware that their journey toward equality is far from complete.

Once again, I extend my thanks to all of you who are here today and to all who have helped make today possible. I firmly believe that this historic commission, the first of its kind in the United States, can accomplish something great. I believe that we have much to learn and much to change. I am grateful that we have a first class talent in Alisa Macht who joins us as our staff leader and the person who will support our deliberations and day to day work.

And I believe more than anything that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities have much to teach us and our state—much to show us about ourselves and our hopes and dreams, and much to guide us in our search for a more just and a more equal future.