

Dear County Council,

We are the parents of two children with autism, and every day our family navigates intense physical, emotional, and logistical demands. Caring for one child with autism is challenging; caring for two multiplies the complexity in ways that are difficult to fully capture unless you live it. Our children have different needs, triggers, schedules, therapies, and behaviors, all of which require constant attention, structure, and supervision.

Our days are carefully choreographed to manage school coordination, therapy appointments, medical care, behavioral support, and crisis prevention—often while balancing employment and caring for our own physical and mental health. Breaks are not optional; they are essential. Without respite care, there is no opportunity to rest, recover, or address our own health needs, which are critical to maintaining long-term caregiving.

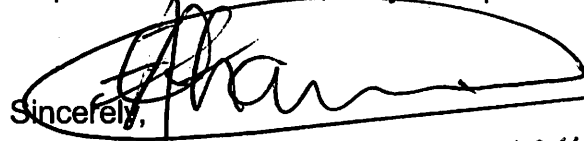
Respite care has been one of the only consistent supports allowing our family to remain stable. It provides us with brief but vital time to recharge, attend appointments, care for our household, and spend one-on-one time with each child. These moments of relief allow us to return to our caregiving roles with greater patience, energy, and capacity.

Beyond our family's well-being, respite care is an economic necessity that keeps parents in the workforce. When times are hard and budgets are tight, cutting these hours is a false economy. For three years, our oldest son's irregular school schedule required a caregiver to be home every Wednesday starting at noon. Because our respite care providers were there to take him off the bus, Ezinne was able to maintain her career as a teacher. Respite hours do not just prevent caregivers from losing their minds; they directly prevent families from losing their livelihoods and keep parents with challenging family situations as productive members of society.

Reducing respite hours from 140 to 120 would have a significant impact on our family. Even at 140 hours, we struggle to stretch support across the entire year. We often run out of hours before the fiscal year ends, leaving long periods with no backup during times of heightened need. A reduction would create even larger gaps in care and increase the risk of burnout and crisis.

Quite simply, 140 hours is not enough to support parents caring for children with autism throughout the year, especially when families are raising more than one child with significant support needs. Any reduction would further destabilize families who are already doing everything possible to keep their children safe, supported, and at home.

Thank you for your consideration and for listening to the voices of families like ours who depend on respite care to survive, not just cope.

Sincerely, 
Emmanuel Akano & Ezinne Akano 04/09/2026.