Shot of a business card. Disability Rights Maryland logo.

♫ jazzy music ♫

Virginia: Hi, I'm Virginia Knowlton Marcus,

I'm the executive director of

Disability Rights Maryland.

Virginia is interviewed at Disability Rights Maryland.

Disability Rights Maryland works closely

with the disability community

to advance disability rights in a

variety of areas including access to housing,

mental health care, special education, transportation,

freedom from abuse, neglect and discrimination.

Shots of various staff members and clients from Disability Rights Maryland.

And by working closely with our clients,

we're also assisting in empowering people

so that they can advocate for themselves,

and that way we'll truly make progress

in disability rights statewide.

We believe that in bringing these stories forward

so that people can see what the impact is of

having a disability on a person's life that they

will assist us in our mission in advancing

disability rights for the benefit of all in society.

Title graphic. Darius. Photo of a young man in a graduation cap and gown.

Darius: My name is Darius Thomas.

I live in Baltimore, Maryland.

Shot of Darius at a computer workstation with professional headphones and microphone.

Darius is interviewed in his living room.

A lot of people don't wanna accept the fact

that they have a disability or an obstacle,

but once you realize and accept that you do,

you can get help and you can get over the obstacle.

Amanda: My name's Amanda White and

I'm a staff attorney at the education unit

at Disability Rights Maryland.

Amanda is interviewed at Disability Rights Maryland.

One of the things that we see here in Maryland

is that students with disabilities are being pushed out

at much higher rates than their non-disabled peers.

I met Darius when he was referred to us

because he was experiencing push out from his school.

He had been proposed for an expulsion.

Darius.

Darius: An administrator that was conducting

the hall sweep basically saw me

running late to class in the hallway,

so I tried to explain to him that he was actually

standing in front of the door my classroom was at,

so he got angry and kept threatening me,

so I got upset and spit on the floor,

and then after that it was just downhill.

♫ sad music ♫

Amanda.

Amanda: The superintendent's designee decided to use

what's called an administrative transfer

to transfer actually Darius to eLearning,

meaning that he was going to be receiving

all of his instruction at home through a computer.

It was this waking up and staying on the computer

for nine hours.

Amanda: That's incredibly detrimental for Darius,

who really needs the opportunity

to learn with other students.

Darius: Not to justify what I did, that was

wrong either way but,

no, I didn't think it was fair.

Shot of Darius at his computer workstation.

Amanda: And so we requested a mitigation session

and were able to successfully get him

back into his high school.

♫ uplifting music ♫

Darius had not been previously identified

as a student with a disability, so he was not receiving

any services or accommodations, so we were also able

to successfully get him an IEP plan that ultimately

allowed him to start doing better in school,

and this past spring he graduated from high school

and is now going to be college-bound this fall.

Shot of Darius smiling in his cap and gown.

Darius: Here it is right here, man.

Gotta show it off.

Darius shows the camera his high school diploma.

Amanda: Darius, like all other students,

have a right to go to school.

And, we're very excited to see him moving forward in life

and doing great things.

Title graphic. Myesha. Photo of a seated woman smiling.

Myesha: My name is Myesha Elder and I live in

Baltimore County in Maryland.

Myesha is interviewed in a wheelchair from her living room.

♫ slow, sad music ♫

I went into the nursing home in 2005

after a motor vehicle accident.

While I was in a nursing home, I was offered a voucher

to find housing,

Shot of Myesha with a care provider.

and I only had 60 days to find housing.

At that time, I was paralyzed from my neck on down.

So I needed something on a one-level floor.

Lauren: I'm Lauren Young.

I'm Director of Litigation for

Disability Rights Maryland.

Lauren is interviewed at Disability Rights Maryland.

What Myesha taught us is that

a person that looks diligently

for accessible housing in Baltimore County

who had a voucher, was not able to find such housing.

Myesha.

Myesha: In the process, I hired a realtor,

I went onto GoSection8.com, I went on Craigslist,

I went on the Sun paper,

church members, family members,

no luck.

Myesha struggles to get out of her wheelchair and onto the step outside her door as a care provider. assists her.

I didn't wanna risk having to be in the nursing home

for long-term care.

I didn't wanna risk not being able to be

in the community altogether.

I said, you know, I just have to pick something

because I wanted to be in the community.

The first place that I found was not accessible.

It had steps.

It was tough.

Lauren.

Lauren: She couldn't supervise her young children,

because she couldn't get to their bedrooms.

She could never use a full bathroom and shower

because it was not accessible.

Myesha: I just felt like, you know, I was hopeless.

♫ uplifting music ♫

Lauren: What our organization ended up doing is we

worked with other legal non-profit

civil rights organizations

and filed a joint complaint with the

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

that challenged how Baltimore County

spent its federal funds and how it discriminated

based on race and disability.

We have a settlement where the county now has to

create 1,000 units of housing

that are gonna be affordable

and at least 10% have to be fully accessible.

Myesha: I don't know where I would be

without Disability Rights Maryland.

They have been nothing but,

I wouldn't have been able to do it without them.

I'm looking forward to being in accessible housing

where me and my family can just be happily ever after.

(giggles)

Title graphic. Phillip. Photo of a smiling man and younger woman, sitting in deck chairs outside.

Kate: My name is Kate Anderson.

I'm an attorney with Disability Rights Maryland.

Kate is interviewed at Disability Rights Maryland.

Shot of an outdoor sign reading, “MTA Maryland Mobility Pick-Up Area.”

MTA Mobility is Baltimore's paratransit service,

Shot of a Mobility van arriving.

and it is a vital part of our public transportation

for people with disabilities.

Phillip: My name is Phillip Freeman,

and I live in Baltimore.

Phillip is interviewed from an office.

Mobility enables me to get around

and do a lot of things that I wouldn't normally

do if I was well.

Shot of Phillip waiting in the Mobility Pick-Up Area.

Kate.

Kate: Phillip feels weak and tired and often very sick

after dialysis treatments.

Shot of Phillip as he exists a Mobility van.

In order to gain access to mobility,

you have to go through a functional assessment

if you have a physical disability.

Phillip went in for his functional assessment,

which is like doing an obstacle course,

and he had a really bad experience. ♫ sad music ♫

Phillip.

Phillip: She was walking so fast, and I just said,

"Hold on a minute."

I said, "I got to stop for a second."

She said, "Look, you got to hurry up and come on,

you're not the only one taking the test today."

And I told her, I said, "I feel like I'm ready to pass out."

Kate: And that's the point where the staff

finally decided that they would

take his blood pressure.

It was dangerously high.

And they finally decided to call the paramedics.

Phillip: And they recommended that at that point

that I go straight to the hospital.

Kate: So Phillip wasn't able to complete his assessment,

but as a result, mobility ended up denying him

for failure to complete the assessment.

Phillip: I was saying to myself, "How much more

more proof do you need,

outside me dying in front of you?"

Kate: It was absolutely not what you would expect

of people who are supposed to be there to

help and whose jobs are working with people

with disabilities and health conditions.

Shots of Phillip and Kate talking outside.

So Disability Rights Maryland took Phillip's case

and worked with Phillip and several other individuals

who were having issues with eligibility,

and we filed a class action lawsuit. ♫ uplifting music ♫

Phillip: Since we got involved in the class action lawsuit,

we've had a lot of different changes,

a lot of positive changes.

Kate: We have settled the case with MTA Mobility,

and the result of that settlement will be

a three-year monitoring period where we will work with

MTA and monitor their efforts to improve

their eligibility process.

Phillip: These people are finally starting to listen,

and starting to do what they should have did at first.

Shots of Kate and Phillip smiling and talking outside.

Kate: As a result of getting involved with

Disability Rights Maryland

and getting involved with this case,

Phillip has become an incredible self-advocate.

Phillip: If I had anything to do with it, I wanted

to make sure if the person

couldn't speak up for their self,

that they had somebody to talk for them or with them,

and I wanted to make sure that nobody else

would ever have to go through

something like that again,

cuz that's just awful.

It's a terrible way to treat somebody.

Title graphic. Ivis. Photo of a woman in a wheelchair having a conversation.

Ivis: My name is Ivis Burris and

I live in Baltimore, Maryland.

Ivis is interviewed from her apartment. She uses a power chair and has a tracheotomy.

I had been in a nursing home for like six months,

and was coming, fastly approaching the

time for me to be discharged.

So, we was trying to figure out what to do,

how was I gonna be able to function on the outside?

Kate Anderson from Disability Rights Maryland is interviewed.

Kate: She left the nursing facility without any type

of in-home support.

And came to us when she found out that there might be

services available to her.

Ivis.

Ivis: You know, sometimes family members get tired,

so I needed somebody from the outside to be able to

come in and help get me up in the morning,

help me to bathe, get dressed.

Shot of Ivis talking with Kate and Virginia inside her apartment.

I contacted Disability Rights Maryland,

and they helped me out, and within

three months, literally three months,

I was on a waiver program.

The home community based waiver program.

If I wasn't on a waiver program,

I'd probably still be in the nursing home.

Kate.

Kate: The nursing facility population is

the biggest population

of institutionalized people in Maryland,

and gaining access to Medicaid services

is one of the most difficult pieces

in discharging from nursing facilities.

Ivis: It's a lot of folks that are in different facilities,

and they don't even know about the waiver program.

♫ jazzy music ♫

Shot of Ivis in her power chair moving through a nursing facility.

Kate: Ivis is one of our Sunshine Folk members.

They go into nursing facilities to let people know

about the waiver options under Medicaid

for home and community based services.

Shot of Ivis smiling and talking with a woman in a bright blue dress at a nursing facility.

Ivis: We follow the individual through the entire process.

We just don't go get they name, and sign them up,

we follow them until they're discharged,

and then after they're discharged,

we can still follow them if they so choose.

Kate: It's all about peer support, and self-advocacy

and helping others become self-advocates.

Shot of Ivis explaining to the woman in the blue dress, who nods that she understands.

Ivis: I'm doing it and we're doing it.

The Sunshine Folk project, excellent.

Excellent group of folks that are

making a difference in the world.

When you see somebody walk through their process

and they end up back in the community,

hands down, mm.

Nothing like it.

It's awesome.

Awesome.

Virginia Knowlton Marcus.

Virginia: These individual client stories represent

just a snapshot of some of the recent work

we've done at Disability Rights Maryland.

We would love for you to learn more

by checking out our website at

www.DisabilityRightsMD.org.

Title graphic with the Disability Rights Maryland logo and website address.

Voiceover: Produced by Rooted in Rights.