



DATE: March 2, 2022 **COMMITTEE:** Budget and Taxation
BILL NO: Senate Bill 636
BILL TITLE: MDH – Waiver Programs – Waitlist Reduction (End the Wait Act)
POSITION: Support

Kennedy Krieger Institute supports Senate bill 636 – Maryland Department of Health – Waiver Programs – Waitlist Reduction (End the Wait Act)

Bill Summary:

Requiring the Maryland Department of Health to develop a plan to reduce the waitlist for certain waiver programs by 50% beginning in fiscal year 2024

Background:

Kennedy Krieger's Neurodiversity at Work program takes a multi-faceted approach to hiring and retaining individuals of all abilities as part of the workforce. Neurodiversity at Work is a collective impact initiative designed to create and support gainful employment for individuals with disabilities, providing economic benefit for businesses and the larger community. The Neurodiversity at Work program fosters integrated workplace settings where all individuals can experience success and independence. Currently the program includes several specialty initiatives Project SEARCH, CORE Foundations, HR pathways hiring program, training and education services, legislative efforts, research, transition consultation services, and planning for a national conference and on-going events.

CORE Foundations at Kennedy Krieger Institute provides person-centered services that foster personal growth, promote meaningful relationships, and empower people with disabilities to achieve independence at their home, workplace and community. CORE Foundations is a licensed Developmental Disabilities Administration adult services provider agency, serving both the central and southern region. CORE Foundations offers employment services, community development services, and behavioral support services.

Rationale:

Currently, 3,694 individuals with disabilities are on the waiting list for services through the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA). This number does not include individuals on the DDA “future request” list, a registry for those who have been found eligible for developmental disability services but are more than 3 years away from entering adult services. In addition, 6,221 school-age children are on the autism registry waiting to go through the eligibility determination process. These children, who are in need of services immediately, must wait years to have the possibility of receiving services. Clearly, far too many Marylanders with disabilities and their families are waiting for critical services and supports they need to live, work, and thrive in their communities.

The plan established under this legislation requires measures to recruit and retain providers for each waiver program. Kennedy Krieger recognizes that dedicated financial resources are needed to support: onboarding and training of new provider agencies, address the staff recruitment and retention crisis of the direct support professionals’ workforce, and increase the capacity of current provider agencies by offering critical funds to expand service offerings and operational infrastructure.

To realize successfully a 50% reduction of the waitlist, measures need to be taken so that providers are able to offer a competitive wage to recruit, train, and retain qualified and skilled employees to support the complex needs of individuals with disabilities.

Kennedy Krieger Institute requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 636