



DATE: February 22, 2023 **COMMITTEE:** Senate Education, Energy and Environment
BILL NO: Senate Bill 551
BILL TITLE: Education - Service Year Option Program - Establishment (Serving Every Region Through Vocational Exploration Act of 2023)
POSITION: Support

Kennedy Krieger Institute supports Senate Bill 551 - Education - Service Year Option Program - Establishment (Serving Every Region Through Vocational Exploration Act of 2023).

Bill Summary:

Senate Bill 551 would establish the service year option for 200 program participants in the first year, growing to 2000 by the fourth year of operation. Participants would be paid \$15 an hour and be paired with a mentor and growth opportunities.

Background:

Kennedy Krieger Institute provides specialized services to patients nationally and internationally. Kennedy Krieger Institute is dedicated to improving the lives of children and young adults with developmental, behavioral, cognitive and physical challenges. Kennedy Krieger's services include inpatient, outpatient, school-based and community-based programs.

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 a Developmental Disabilities Administration Licensed Agency, HR pathways hiring program, training and education services, legislative efforts, research, transition consultation services, and planning for a national conference and on-going events.

Kennedy Krieger Institute is an inclusive employer that believes that individuals with disabilities have the skills, talents, and drive to contribute significantly to the workforce and to the broader community. A neurodiverse workforce benefits all.

Rationale:

Young adults with developmental disabilities depend on workforce training programs to support their professional growth as they enter the labor force. Many unpaid programs currently exist, including Project SEARCH – a 10-month, unpaid transition to work program – and various work-based learning experiences targeted to students in their final years of school. Opportunities for paid employment and training would further support the transition to the labor force for young adults with developmental disabilities. Paid training experiences benefit both young adults and employers, allowing for young adults to access career paths earlier in life, and enabling employers to appropriately value the contributions of those with developmental disabilities. Enabling these paid training opportunities would also expand the workforce in Maryland and provide a long-term economic benefit to the state.

Kennedy Krieger Institute requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 551.