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Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
SB 551: Education - Service Year Option Program - Establishment
(Serving Every Region Through Vocational Exploration Act of 2023)
February 22, 2023

Position: **Support with Amendment**

The Arc Maryland is the largest statewide advocacy organization dedicated to protecting and advancing the rights and quality of life of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

We support the Governor's Service Year Option Program with amendments designed to include all graduating students, and students with disabilities exiting high school with a Certificate of High School Completion will have the option to participate.

The employment rate of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities is currently very low compared to their typical peers. In addition, people with more significant disabilities may not be able to tolerate full time work, but **want to work** and will work as much as their conditions will allow them to work.

According to the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Administration's employment data from May 2022, less than 30% of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities who receive DDA services were engaged in paid employment. The average number of hours of work people worked per week was 25.2 hours with 22.2% working more than 20 hours per week.¹ This number is increasing every year due to our Employment First mindset, training, and supports but is low compared to people with other disabilities and also compared with the rest of the population.

This bill would create a paid service year opportunity to exiting high school students and would provide an amazing lift to individuals with disabilities to have the opportunity to demonstrate their skills and talents with employers who receive incentives to hire them. We believe that this opportunity may very well lead to continued employment, beyond that introductory period, for many people.

The definition of "Program Participant", in the bill, does not currently include students who are exiting High School with a **Certificate of High School Completion**. We believe all students who complete the requirements of high school should be eligible for the work/service opportunity as it will help them contribute to the economy, and advance their opportunities for success in employment post high school.

We believe it was not the intention of the sponsors to disqualify students exiting with Certificates from this program and hope this unintended omission can be easily remedied. We recommend the following amendments to clarify that **all students who complete high school (with a Diploma or Certificate) or have an equivalent degree such as a GED can participate in the Program with flexibility in the number of hours they will work, in accordance with their individualized abilities to work each week.**

¹ https://www.statedata.info/mdda/charts/activity_2.php



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Proposed bill amendments are as follows:

Page 3, lines 1-6:

(F) "PROGRAM PARTICIPANT" MEANS AND INDIVIDUAL WHO: (1) HAS RECEIVED A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA, GED, OR COMPARABLE PROOF OF EQUIVALENT EDUCATIONAL LEVEL WITHIN 2 YEARS BEFORE APPLYING FOR A SERVICE PLACEMENT UNDER THE PROGRAM; **OR (2) HAS RECEIVED A MARYLAND HIGH SCHOOL CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION.**

page 5, line 9:

(I) WORK AT LEAST 30 HOURS PER WEEK, **UNLESS OTHERWISE APPROVED BY THE DEPARTMENT.**

We appreciate the intention of this bill and we are grateful for the opportunity to provide comment.

Please contact:

Lori Scott, President of the Board of Directors
Parent of a High School student with disabilities
The Arc Maryland