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1500 Union Ave., Suite 2000, Baltimore, MD 21211

Phone: 410-727-6352 | Fax: 410-727-6389

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## **SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

### **House Bill 60: Rehabilitation Services — Disability - Definition**

**Date: March 19, 2024**

**Position: Support**

Disability Rights Maryland (DRM) is the Protection and Advocacy organization (P&A) for the state of Maryland; the mission of the organization, part of a national network of similar agencies, is to advocate for the legal rights of people with disabilities throughout the state. One of the mandated purposes of DRM's legal work is to advance the civil rights of people with disabilities. HB60 would further this goal by establishing an updated definition of "disability" in the Maryland Education code, to include updated language that promotes human dignity and recognizes the equal, inherent, and inalienable value of every person. The outdated and ableist terms currently contained in Md. Code Ann., Educ. § 21-301 incorrectly characterize those with disabilities as imperfect and feeble.

The statute currently defines disability as "any defect or infirmity that may incapacitate an individual totally or partially for gainful employment or independent living. HB60 will update the definition of disability in Md. Code Ann., Educ. § 21-301 to mirror the definition in the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, defining disability as "a physical or mental impairment that constitutes or results in a substantial impediment to employment."

By changing the definition of disability in the Maryland Education Article to reflect modern language and federal statutes, House Bill 60 will promote equity by ensuring that individuals with disabilities are treated with respect. For these reasons, DRM supports House Bill 60.

For more information or if questions, contact: Megan Jones, Assistant Managing Attorney, [meganj@disabilityrightsmd.org](mailto:meganj@disabilityrightsmd.org) or 443-692-2508.