Kennedy Krieger Institute

DATE: **February 7, 2023** **COMMITTEE: Finance**
BILL NO: **Senate Bill 331**
BILL TITLE: **Task Force to Study Paratransit in Maryland**
POSITION: **Support**

Kennedy Krieger Institute supports Senate Bill 331 - Task Force to Study Paratransit in Maryland.

Bill Summary:
This bill establishes the task force to study paratransit in Maryland. The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) must provide staff for the task force. The task force must study paratransit in the State, including (1) current, needed, and expected funding for paratransit; (2) reasons for current funding and spending gaps; and (3) the role public-private partnerships could play in meeting funding and service gaps.

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 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:
The inclusion of policies, procedures, plans, and goals that would increase access to reliable and equitable transportation for individuals with disabilities will have a profound impact on an individual's ability to access their community and workplace. Transportation continues to be a barrier for individuals with disabilities when accessing their community and workplace due to inaccessible public transportation, limited cross-county transportation, financial implications of public transportation, and reliability of scheduled paratransit. A study of Maryland's paratransit services would provide an opportunity to identify extant barriers and to develop innovative solutions to overcome those barriers, bringing economic benefit to Maryland and Maryland employers. People with disabilities want the opportunity to join the workforce; accessing employment begins with accessible and reliable transportation. Transportation should not affect an employers' ability to build and maintain an inclusive workforce.

Amendment:
We recommend amending the bill so that it enables the task force to provide recommendations and findings, for consideration, as part of the larger transit equity analysis and 2045 Maryland transportation plan. "The department shall consider ways to achieve equity in the transportation sector when developing the state transportation goals[1]." The review and analysis of the paratransit system is needed to develop solutions to enhance and improve services.

Kennedy Krieger Institute requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 331.

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[1] https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2023RS/Chapters_noln/CH_583_hb0009e.pdf