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Ways and Means Committee

Education Subcommittee

Finance Resources Subcommittee



The Maryland House of Delegates
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Support HB 847

State Coordinator of Autism Strategy

Dear Madame Chair and Senate Finance Committee,

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of HB847 to designate a position in the Department of Disabilities to develop and provide oversight for a strategic master plan to address the needs of our citizens on the Autism Spectrum.

One in fifty Marylanders are diagnosed with ASD and our state, like many others, is woefully unprepared to address the looming fiscal and societal implications of the increasing challenges people with ASD face as they age. They and their families often struggle with independent living, job instability, and access to needed social and health-related supports. That is why I have introduced HB847 to establish a State Coordinator of Autism Strategy in the Department of Disabilities. This position will provide oversight and accountability for a strategic plan to address these concerns with the advice of a stakeholder advisory group to be appointed by the Governor. It is time for Maryland to take proactive measures to care for the future of our state and our citizens by implementing thoughtful and efficient strategies while they can still be effective.

During the 2019 legislative session I introduced a bill in HGO to establish a taskforce to examine the barriers facing citizens with ASD. This interim, I worked with the Department of Disabilities and advocacy groups to conduct surveys and convene families who are affected by ASD to identify needs. The respondents identified many of the same concerns: the lack of accessible and reliable transportation, problems finding affordable housing, inadequate supports to address health and mental health needs, and a need for social supports and employment-based services. The vast majority of the young adult focus group members had finished at least some college and yet were had difficulty negotiating the job market or maintain employment because of their inability to successfully navigate the workplace. In fact, 80% of adults with ASD are unemployed or underemployed. These rates are much higher than unemployment rates of those with other developmental disabilities.

The future of all citizens with and without disabilities will be enriched by the passage of HB847 to prioritize the needs of citizens with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

I respectfully request a favorable report on HB847.

Thank you,

Delegate Michele Guyton