



TO: The Honorable Delores G. Kelley, Chair
Members, Senate Finance Committee
The Honorable Michele Guyton

FROM: Pamela Metz Kasemeyer

DATE: March 23, 2021

RE: **SUPPORT** – House Bill 718 – *State Coordinator for Autism Strategy and Advisory Stakeholder Group on Autism-Related Needs – Mandated Appropriation*

For more than 60 years, Linwood Center has been providing life-changing programs and services for children and adults living with autism and related developmental disabilities. Linwood currently supports child and adults on the autism spectrum from jurisdictions throughout the State of Maryland. Linwood is one of a handful of programs in the United States and one of only three in the state of Maryland that provides comprehensive education and residential programs throughout the lifespan under one service umbrella. Linwood offers program continuity from childhood into adulthood, developing lifelong relationships with individuals living with autism from elementary school through retirement and old age. Linwood's accredited nonpublic special education program and licensed residential programs provide intensive positive behavioral supports and long-term educational and vocational services to Maryland's autism community. Linwood respectfully offers its **support** for House Bill 718.

In 2020, the General Assembly enacted legislation that established a State Coordinator for Autism Strategy in the Department of Disabilities as well as an Advisory Stakeholder Group on Autism-Related Needs. The State Coordinator, in consultation with the stakeholder group, was charged with identifying and evaluating existing public, private, and nonprofit services for individuals with autism and their families. The findings of that review were to be used to develop a strategic plan for addressing autism-related needs in the State, including employment, housing, health care, training for first responders, and criminal justice professionals, as well as identification and intervention. However, despite the passage of the legislation, there have been no funds appropriated for the position of State Coordinator. Therefore, the work envisioned by the passage of last year's legislation has not moved forward. House Bill 718 provides for the appropriation necessary to fill the State Coordinator position and, therefore, enable the charges and objectives of the original legislation to move forward. The bill, as amended, also moves the position of the State Coordinator to the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives, which Linwood supports.

Given Linwood's extensive history and universally recognized expertise in providing comprehensive education and residential programs for individuals on the autism spectrum, Linwood believes it is essential for a State Coordinator to be hired to enable the State to move forward with the important work reflected in the 2020 legislation. A favorable report is requested.

For more information call:

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