

Education Advocacy Coalition

for Students with Disabilities

SENATE EDUCATION, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

HB 660: Commission to Study the Division of Rehabilitative Services (Student Job Training Reformation Act)

March 23, 2022

Position: Support with Amendment

The Education Advocacy Coalition for Students with Disabilities (EAC), a coalition of approximately 40 organizations and individuals concerned with education policy for students with disabilities in Maryland, supports House Bill 660, which would create a Commission to study and evaluate the operation of the Division of Rehabilitative Services (DORS). This effort is much needed, as many students with disabilities are not able to access, or are not able to easily access, services from DORS.

Currently, DORS serves individuals with disabilities through a process known as “order of selection;” and only individuals with the most significant disabilities who require support to obtain or maintain employment are able to get services immediately. Individuals with “significant” disabilities are currently added to a waiting list, and individuals with “non-severe” disabilities are informed by the DORS website that “DORS does not expect to provide services to eligible individuals with “non-severe disabilities” (Category 3) in the foreseeable future.” On its website, DORS attributes its decision to implement “order of selection” on the growth of the Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) program: “As a result of the tremendous growth of Pre-ETS since 2014, DORS has had to shift staff from the VR [vocational rehabilitation] program to the Pre-ETS program. As such, we no longer have the human resources available to manage both programs.” Although DORS’ Pre-ETS are supposed to better prepare students in high school for transition and for employment, these services are not robust enough. Because full DORS services are not available to most students following graduation, and because the quality of transition services is so variable across the state, many students with disabilities throughout the state who don’t have the most significant disabilities are left in a void when they leave high school, prepared for neither employment nor other post-secondary options and left without the supports they need to be able to access those opportunities. Additionally, graduates with disabilities in more rural and remote areas of the state have fewer opportunities available to them.

The EAC appreciates that House Bill 660 would require a comprehensive evaluation of DORS and its services and strongly supports the bill with two amendments: First, that the Maryland Department of Disabilities should be added as a required member of the Commission, and second, that included in the responsibilities of the Commission shall be the responsibility to evaluate and make recommendations on “ways to enhance the capacity of DORS to serve more people, including a thorough review of the Workforce Technology Center, and ways to provide more inclusive work-based experiences.”

Please contact Leslie Seid Margolis, chairperson, at lesliem@disabilityrightsmd.org or 410-370-5730 with questions.

Respectfully submitted,

Selene Almazan, Selene Almazan Law, LLC

Rene Averitt-Sanzone, The Parents' Place of Maryland

Linda Barton, MSED, Education Advocate

Beth Benevides, Howard County Autism Society

Ellen Callegary, Law Offices of Ellen A. Callegary, P.A.

Rich Ceruolo, Parent Advocacy Consortium

Michelle Davis, ABCs for Life Success

Ann Geddes, Maryland Coalition of Families

Beth Ann Hancock, Charting the Course

Kalman Hettleman, Independent Advocate

Morgan Durand Horvath, M.Ed., Abilities Network

Rosemary Kitzinger and Marjorie Guldán, Bright Futures, LLC

Rachel London, Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council

Leslie Seid Margolis, Disability Rights Maryland

Maria Ott, Attorney

Rebecca Rienzi, Pathfinders for Autism

Jaime Seaton, BGS Law

Karleen Spitulnik, Decoding Dyslexia Maryland

Ronnetta Stanley, M.Ed., Loud Voices Together

Wayne Steedman, Steedman Law Group

Maureen van Stone, Mallory Legg, and Alyssa Thorn, Project HEAL at Kennedy Krieger Institute