



LARRY HOGAN
GOVERNOR

STATE HOUSE
100 STATE CIRCLE
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401-1925
(410) 974-3901
(TOLL FREE) 1-800-811-8336

TTY USERS CALL VIA MD RELAY

**TESTIMONY
IN SUPPORT OF SB 169
STATE AUTISM STRATEGY REVISIONS
DEPARTMENTAL BILL -- GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF COMMUNITY INITIATIVES
January 27, 2022**

Senate Finance Committee
Senator Delores G. Kelley, Chair

Good afternoon Madam Chair and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of SB 169, the Hogan Administration's departmental bill through the request of the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives (GOCI) that would make technical changes to the the State Coordinator for Autism Strategy [the coordinator] and the Advisory Stakeholder Group on Autism-Related Needs [the advisory group]. My name is Patrick Lally and I am the Senior Executive Director of the Governor's Coordinating Offices, the State organization that houses the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives that is in charge of the coordinator and advisory group. You should also have in your bill file a letter in support of SB 169 from Secretary Carol Beatty of the Department of Disabilities.

Before I begin, I would like to commend Delegate Michelle Guyton for her tireless work on behalf of persons with Autism and their families. Her efforts to create the coordinator and advisory group are laudable and will have manifold long-term benefits for those with Autism, their loved ones, and the entire community.

I would also like you to know that pursuant to the statute, the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives has hired the State Autism Coordinator and established the Advisory Group on Autism-Related Needs. The panel's first meeting will take place on February 10th and I anticipate it will be the beginning of some very important and beneficial work in this field on behalf of the State of Maryland.

Regarding the departmental bill, SB 169 would make certain technical changes to the underlying statute. Most of these changes would correct references to the agency of jurisdiction. Originally, the Department of Disabilities was envisioned as the lead agency in implementing these statutory programs. Ultimately, the

Governor's Office of Community Initiatives became the implementing agency and, therefore, incorrect or unnecessary references to the Department of Disabilities should be replaced with GOCI. SB 169 would accomplish this goal.

Two other changes proposed by the Administration are: 1) amending the composition of the advisory group to include one representative from the Maryland Senate appointed by the President of the Senate, and two representatives from the House of Delegates appointed by the Speaker; 2) and changing the requirement that the coordinator chair the advisory group by having the governor appoint the chair from among those serving on the panel.

First, the Administration feels that the addition of representatives from the General Assembly to the advisory group would enhance the panel considerably and greatly assist in furthering its goals.

Second, the Administration would like to see the advisory group's structure comport with the standard organizational structure established by the dozen commissions already under the purview of the Governor's Office of Community initiatives. Each of these operates with a director -- the equivalent of the State Autism Coordinator -- who administers commission activities, but is not a member of the panel; the advisory group being analogous to a commission. This allows for good governance and balance in everything from the administration of reimbursements to overall fiscal supervision. Furthermore, it gives panels, commissions, and advisory groups the ability to secure the highest quality leadership on policies and issues that can have a powerful voice independent from, but cooperating with, the director.

Lastly, it is consistent with the Governor's State Transparency and Accountability Reform (STAR) Commission recommendations in December 2021 regarding the operations and structures of state quasi-governmental agencies. Although the advisory group is not a quasi-governmental agency, some best practices outlined in the STAR Report would apply; this, from page 16 of the report:

"The executive director should only serve on the board as an ex officio and nonvoting member. The governing boards should always seek to remain independent from the executive director and management personnel, which helps give the board legitimacy and keep them free from any undue influence from the agency's day-to-day leadership. The executive director should be attending the board meetings, but should not have any voting powers, and should attend the meetings only to provide informational updates. It appears that most boards are now operating in this format."

With this overview, Madam Chair and members of the committee, I conclude my testimony. I am optimistic that the coordinator and the advisory group will work hard and have tremendous success in improving the lives of those with Autism and their families. I look forward to furthering those activities and I would be happy to answer any questions.