

Briana Pistone Testimony Senate Bill 602

My name is Briana Pistone; I am a Work First Foundation Fellow closely with America Works of Maryland, Inc. (AWMD). I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today in support of the Bail Diversion Program and the resources provided to support the success and rehabilitation of the clients sent to us. In June 2017 AWMD collaborated with the WFF and Baltimore City District Court Judge Pastore to launch the bail diversion initiative. The goal is to provide stable and gainful employment as an alternative to incarceration, giving deserving defendants a second chance. When AWMD receives a referral for services, we assess an individual's immediate needs, such as stable housing, childcare, transportation, and professional clothing. After this assessment, they are immediately enrolled in job training services and meet with an AWMD Sales Representative to find an employment position that fits their skills and qualifications. As of January 2022, we are proud to share that we have placed 140 participants into full-time employment; 87% have been retained for 30 days, 80% for 90 days, and 67% for 180 days. Due to our long-standing relationship in the Baltimore Metro area, we have partnerships with employers willing to hire defendants despite having open charges. They, as well as AWMD, believe in stable employment as the means for a second chance to reintegrate into society.

In addition, we offer a wide variety of trainings to prepare our participants for the roles needed to reenter the workforce. Our trainings ranges from basic skills, including resume writing, interview preparation, conflict resolution, how to turn on the computer, to more advanced computer skills and essential professional skills. Furthermore, the Training and Sales Team offer more customized services when meeting with participants to discuss potential employment opportunities largely based upon their interests and background. We also hold a

myriad of events, including a quarterly job fair where we expose participants to employers from many different industries and allow them to showcase their developing skills. Each week, we send information about new open positions, market changes, and independent job fairs hosted by partnered employers as well.

Additional resources we provide come from our local partnerships and outreach to other reputable organizations that can assist clients with wraparound services such mental health treatment for themselves and their families. We partnered with larger organizations like the Kidney Foundation and the American Heart Association speak with our clients biannually to discuss ways to improve wellness in everyday life. Our goal is to meet clients where they are in their job search and assist them in all aspects of their lives to ensure long-term employment retention and overall prosperity. Voting in favor of this bill will ensure America Works of Maryland can continue to devote our best efforts to empower individuals and guide them toward a path to stable employment. Thank you for your time and consideration.