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HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

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

February 24, 2022

Position: Support with Amendment

The attorneys in The Law Offices of Ellen A. Callegary, P.A. represent students with disabilities throughout Maryland. For over forty years, I have worked to protect the most vulnerable members of our community --- children and adults with disabilities. Beginning with my time as an Assistant Attorney General in Maryland in 1979 and continuing through today as a private attorney working on their behalf. Because of my concern for individuals with disabilities in Maryland, I support House Bill 660, which would create a Commission to study and evaluate the operation of the Division of Rehabilitative Services (DORS). This bill is much needed, as many of our clients with disabilities are not able to easily access appropriate services from DORS. Personally, I have seen my family members with disabilities struggle to get the supports they need to be productive members of our communities.

Typically, DORS first becomes involved with our clients through the individualized education program (IEP) process. Sometimes, DORS representatives are invited to participate in IEP Team Meetings when the team is discussing the transition services a student with disabilities needs to be successful after graduation. Often the services that are offered are extremely limited. They are not the highly individualized services that our clients need in order to make the tough transition to the adult service systems and the world of work. Many families report that their family members did not receive meaningful rehabilitative services for their loved ones. Although DORS' Pre-Employment Transition Services 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 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.

I strongly support 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."