

Hello, and thank you for this opportunity to testify.

My name is Danielle Bustos, and I work with students with disabilities across the state of Maryland.

Through the Maryland youth leadership forum, I have had the opportunity to meet a diverse group of young individuals who all seemed to have the same worries I did when I was their age. “How am I going to live independently in the future?”

The short answer is to find employment, but from personal experience I know that the process to accomplish that is very complicated, frustrating and scary. In general, it is very difficult for a person with a disability to find and keep employment. In addition, it becomes a bigger barrier when students are automatically disqualified based on their certificate of completion.

Across the board, whether the student is on a diploma track or a certificate track, the process of finding employment can be daunting. At such a young age students need practice with communication and problem solving to be successful in the workplace. Many times students feel like they're being thrown to the wolves by not having that practice before entering their first job.

This program, [HB0546](#) / [SB0551](#) – **Serving Every Region Through Vocational Exploration Act of 2023 – Dorothy**, would help them better prepare and give them opportunity to make mistakes and learn from those mistakes so that when they do find employment after the service year, they feel more confident and better prepared to take on their new role. In addition, this program can serve as a gateway for the student to find permanent employment.

As the coordinator of MDY LF I look forward to the day where I may offer this program as a resource for my students who are struggling to find their path.

Thank you.

Danielle Bustos (she, her, hers)

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