



DATE: February 22, 2023 **COMMITTEE:** House Ways and Means
BILL NO: House Bill 621
BILL TITLE: State Department of Education - Division of Rehabilitation Services - Information Posted on Website
POSITION: Support

Kennedy Krieger Institute supports Houser Bill 621 - State Department of Education - Division of Rehabilitation Services - Information Posted on Website.

Bill Summary:

House Bill 621 requires the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) in the State Department of Education to post the total number of open cases in the Division's caseload each month.

Background:

Kennedy Krieger's Neurodiversity at Work program takes a multi-faceted approach to hiring and retaining individuals of all abilities as part of the workforce. Neurodiversity at Work is a collective impact initiative designed to create and support gainful employment for individuals with disabilities, providing economic benefit for businesses and the larger community. The Neurodiversity at Work program fosters integrated workplace settings where all individuals can experience success and independence. Currently the program includes several specialty initiatives Project SEARCH, CORE Foundations a Developmental Disabilities Administration licensed agency, HR pathways hiring program, training and education services, legislative efforts, research, transition consultation services, and planning for a national conference and on-going events.

CORE Foundations at Kennedy Krieger Institute is a Community Rehabilitation Partner through the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) and provides short-term employment services for individuals with disabilities including but not limited to; job development preparation, job development, and job coaching.

Kennedy Krieger Institute is an inclusive employer that believes that individuals with disabilities have the skills, talents, and drive to contribute significantly to the workforce and to the broader community. A neurodiverse workforce benefits all.

Rationale:

The Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) has crucial services for individuals with disabilities. These programs are the building blocks for a successful transition from school to meaningful employment and increasing independence. If utilized to maximum capacity, the range of services available can support students from as early as age 14 years through adulthood. Accessing services through DORS can be challenging for many individuals with disabilities, and has become significantly more challenging due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2020, DORS provided services to 21,898 individuals with significant disabilities, of which 42% were between the ages of 14 and 24 years (DORS annual report, 2020). This number represents a relatively small fraction of the individuals in Maryland living with disabilities. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Disability and Health Data System there were 1,040,158 Marylanders living with a disability in 2019. According to the *Study of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) Process and the Adequate Funding Level for Students with Disabilities* completed by WestEd during the 2017-2018 school year there were 97,233 students with individualized education plans in the Maryland School Systems.

Posting the open caseloads each month will increase transparency and accountability of DORS. This has a potential to allow for the review of the current policies, processes, and efficiencies of DORS.

Through our Neurodiversity at Work program, Kennedy Krieger has first-hand experience on the positive impact that a consumer receiving services through DORS has on obtaining meaningful employment. A sequence of services that are accessible and continually evaluated will set a DORS consumer up for success.

Maryland has done outstanding work for the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in our community and meaningful services available to Marylanders; however, there is a very large discrepancy between the number of individuals with disabilities receiving services versus the number of Marylanders with disabilities who may need such services. As an Employment First State, there is value in collaboration between agencies that support individuals with disabilities to expand service options, increase capacity, and increase employment outcomes in the state of Maryland. By establishing this Commission, a strategic plan may be developed that has the potential to increase capacity to serve more Marylanders.

Kennedy Krieger Institute requests a favorable report on House Bill 621.

Sources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, Division of Human Development and Disability. Disability and Health Data System (DHDS) Data [online]. [accessed Feb 20, 2022]. URL: <https://dhds.cdc.gov>

Jason Willis, Sara Menlove Doutre, & Alex Berg Jacobson (2019). Study of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) Process and the Adequate Funding Level for Students with Disabilities. West Ed. [accessed Feb 20, 2022] URL: <https://marylandpublicschools.org/Documents/IEPStudy/MDSpecialEdIEPAdequacyStudyConsolidatedReportFinal122019.pdf>.