



## **HB1222: State Department of Education – Division of Rehabilitation Services – Funding and Staffing**

### **SUPPORT-Testimony of Maryland Centers for Independent Living**

House Ways and Means Committee March 8, 2023

The seven Centers for Independent Living (CIL) were established by federal law and work to ensure the civil rights and quality services of people with disabilities in Maryland. Centers for Independent Living are nonprofit disability resource and advocacy organizations located throughout Maryland operated by and for people with disabilities. CIL staff and Boards are at least 51% people with disabilities. We are part of a nationwide network which provides Information and Referral, Advocacy, Peer Support, Independent Living Skills training, and Transition Services.

For many people, a critical component of living independently is finding employment. Employment services are especially important for people with disabilities. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2022, only 21.3 percent of persons with a disability were employed, compared with 65.4 percent of persons without a disability. The need for supports training, education and accommodations for persons with disabilities is essential to obtaining greater job equity. Our historic exclusion and discrimination of the disabled requires investments to allow such individuals to thrive and have productive opportunities. It was not until 1990, with passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, that employment discrimination of persons with disabilities was prohibited.

The Division of Rehabilitative Services (DORS) has a mandate to offer programs and services that help people with disabilities go to work. State funding, however, has not provided the necessary staffing for DORS. Instead of services, we have waiting lists. Instead of pathways out of poverty (people with disabilities live in poverty at twice the rate of their non-disabled peers), people with disabilities are kept in queue. To meet the federal mandates and ensure work force investment, we must have accountability and a fully functioning Division of Rehabilitative Services. HB 1222 will provide corrective action and allow services to flow to those persons with disabilities who are eligible for such services.

We add one more comment, which addresses language in the existing statute. The statute states: “Disability means any defect or infirmity that may incapacitate an individual totally or partially for gainful employment or independent living” (p.2, line 1). This offensive and stigmatizing language should be stricken. “Disability” should correspond to the definition of an individual with a disability as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

We thank you for your consideration and anticipated support.

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