Kennedy Krieger Institute

DATE: **February 21, 2024** **COMMITTEE: Budget and Taxation**
BILL NO: **Senate Bill 859**
BILL TITLE: **State Department of Education - Division of Rehabilitation Services - Funding**
POSITION: **Support**

Kennedy Krieger Institute supports Senate Bill 859 - State Department of Education - Division of Rehabilitation Services - Funding

Bill Summary:
This bill authorizes the Governor to include in the annual budget bill a state appropriation for the Division of Rehabilitative Servies that meets the state match amount for the Division, as required by certain federal acts.

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.

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 benefit all.

Rationale:
The Department of Rehabilitation Services, operating under the State Department of Education, plays a pivotal role in empowering individuals with disabilities to integrate into the workforce and community life. From age 14 onwards, these services offer a wide spectrum of support that is vital for those not eligible for Developmental Disabilities Administration services, or who require assistance before waiver eligibility at age 21.

Securing state funding, coupled with federal matching grants, is paramount to uphold Maryland's Employment First initiatives and ensuring equitable access to employment for all individuals with disabilities. However, the current funding landscape poses challenges, including waitlists and limited coverage.

Granting the Governor the flexibility to secure federal funding matches and augment the general fund allocation is imperative. This flexibility would bolster the Department's capacity to serve more individuals, reduce waitlists, and meet the diverse needs of Maryland's disability community effectively.

Kennedy Krieger Institute requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 859.

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