



Kennedy Krieger Institute

**DATE: February 14, 2024**                                 **COMMITTEE: Ways and Means**  
**BILL NO: House Bill 837**  
**BILL TITLE: More Opportunities for Career Focused Students Act of 2024**  
**POSITION: Support**

**Kennedy Krieger Institute supports House Bill 837 - More Opportunities for Career Focused Students Act of 2024.**

**Bill Summary:**

This bill requires local school systems to help high school students apply for admission to registered apprenticeship programs. Public high schools must also inform students of employment and skills training opportunities.

**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, including intellectual and developmental, 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 such as: 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 benefits all.

**Rationale:**

The state Blueprint for Maryland's Future has opened opportunities for career exploration, internships, and pathways from school to work for students encountering barriers in transitioning from school to employment. This legislation takes that mission further, by requiring public high schools to provide information and resources for students seeking apprenticeship programs.

Young adults with developmental disabilities depend on workforce training programs to support their professional growth as they enter the labor force. Many unpaid programs currently exist, including Project SEARCH – a 10-month, unpaid transition to work program – and various work-based learning experiences targeted to students in their final years of school. Paid training experiences benefit both young adults and employers, allowing for young adults to access career paths earlier in life, and enabling employers to appropriately value the contributions of those with developmental disabilities.

We applaud and support the goal of this legislation which will provide opportunities for students transitioning into post-education and career programs.

**Kennedy Krieger Institute requests a favorable report on House Bill 837.**