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Dear Committee,

On behalf of SEEC, a community provider of disability services, I am writing to express our strong support for HB0502, the State As a Model Employer bill. This critical legislation will establish the Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy within the Department of Disabilities and formally launch the Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative. By creating a framework to enhance the hiring, recruitment, retention, and advancement of individuals with disabilities in the state government workforce, this bill represents a meaningful step toward a more inclusive and equitable workforce in Maryland.

Maryland has one of the tightest labor markets in the country, ranking 6th among states facing challenges in hiring for open jobs. The labor force participation rate in the state is declining, and Maryland currently has one of the lowest unemployment rate in the nation. While demand for workers is high, the supply remains scarce. The Comptroller recently shared there are currently 3.1 job openings for every one job seeker in Maryland, compared to a national average of 1.3 openings per job seeker.

While the employment rate for people with disabilities in the state is just under 50%—more than double the national average—it remains significantly lower than that of the general population. Additionally, individuals with disabilities in Maryland are three times as likely as someone in the state's general population to be unemployed. These numbers highlight the pressing need for targeted efforts to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

At SEEC, we have seen firsthand the success that is possible when individuals with disabilities are given equitable employment opportunities. The people we support earn competitive wages and their combined annualized earnings amount to \$3.9 million, demonstrating their significant contributions to the workforce and economy.

Furthermore, employees with disabilities supported by SEEC tend to have lower turnover rates compared to typical entry-level positions. A remarkable 89% of the individuals we support have remained in their job for over a year, with an average tenure of 5.2 years in the same position. This 10% turnover rate is significantly lower than the standard turnover rate for entry-level positions, illustrating the stability and value of these employees to their workplaces.

As an organization dedicated to empowering individuals with disabilities through employment opportunities and community support, SEEC recognizes the immense value that individuals with disabilities bring to the workforce. HB0502 will help ensure that Maryland sets a strong example for inclusive employment practices, fostering a state workforce that reflects the diverse talents and capabilities of all its citizens.

We ask the General Assembly to pass HB0502 and demonstrate Maryland's commitment to fostering an inclusive workforce that recognizes and values the contributions of people with disabilities. Thank

you for your consideration of this vital legislation. We appreciate your commitment to advancing inclusive employment opportunities for all Marylanders.

Warmly,

Karen Lee, SEEC, CEO