

HB 502: Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy and Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative-Established
Written Testimony of Mary Manzoni, CEO Maryland Works

Presented to: Appropriations Committee

Date: 2/11/25

Position: Support

Good afternoon honorable committee members. My name is Mary Manzoni. I serve as CEO of Maryland Works, a statewide association of non-profit community service providers and individual workforce development professionals who provide job training, employment, and business ownership opportunities for people with disabilities and other barriers to employment. Maryland Works is also included in the State Preferred Provider Program. On behalf of our board of directors I urge you to support House Bill 502. This bill is extremely important if we want to provide individuals with disabilities meaningful opportunities that will assist them with preparing and obtaining employment-JOBS-CAREERS.

Maryland Works strongly supports the passage of The Model Employer Act. This legislation takes a critical step towards addressing the persistent underemployment of Marylanders with disabilities.

Maryland is fortunate to have a Governor, elected officials and State leadership who genuinely care about and are invested in the well-being of all Marylanders. Governor Moore's pledge to leave no one behind is clearly demonstrated in this bill. The creation of the Maryland Department of Disabilities in 2004 signaled a commitment to improving the lives of Marylanders with disabilities. This Act builds upon that foundation by enhancing MDOD's role in coordinating employment-related initiatives across State agencies. Over 20 years later the Department of Disabilities is guided by strong leadership and an unwavering commitment to support individuals with disabilities.

Maryland Works has had the privilege of working closely with the Maryland Department of Disabilities for many years in our mission to support the employment of individuals with disabilities. People with disabilities in Maryland have historically faced significant barriers to employment, experiencing lower rates of labor force participation and earning potential compared to their non-disabled peers. Establishing the Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy will result in many positive outcomes.

- Assisting this untapped labor pool in securing employment obtaining careers with sustaining wages and growth opportunities, leading to greater economic independence and improved quality of life.
- Enhancing state workforce by fostering greater diversity and inclusion. leveraging the unique skills and perspectives of individuals with disabilities.
- Setting an example and positioning Maryland as a leader in disability inclusion, attracting top

talent from across the state and creating National Best Practices in State employment for individuals with disabilities.

Conclusion:

HB 502 is a vital step towards creating a more equitable and inclusive Maryland for all. By establishing the Office of Disability Employment Advancement Policy and implementing the Initiative, the State can demonstrate its commitment to disability inclusion and inspire positive changes across the public and private sectors.

On behalf of Maryland Works and our Board of Directors, we thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony and urge your support.

Respectfully,



Mary L. Manzoni
CEO
Maryland Works
Office: 410.381.8660
Cell: 443.831.7867
marym@mdworks.com



Phone

410.381.8660



Email

info@mdworks.com



Address

**10270 Old Columbia Rd. Ste 100
Columbia, MD 21046**