

DATE: February 11, 2025
BILL: HB 502 – Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy and
Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative - Established
COMMITTEE: Appropriations
POSITION: Favorable

Dear Chair Barnes,

My name is English Harper, and I am writing in support of House Bill 502.

Currently, I work as an Information & Assistance Specialist for the Anne Arundel County Department of Aging & Disabilities' Maryland Access Point office. However, I am writing this letter in my capacity as a private citizen, not on behalf of my employer. HB 502 would offer me additional employment opportunities, which I would greatly appreciate, given the challenges and setbacks I faced when starting my career again following my spinal cord injury.

Exiting high school, I had the option to go to college or to become an Electrician's Apprentice, which would provide me not only with valuable, paid experience and a path to a Journeyman Electrician's license, but with 60 college credits upon completion as well, should I opt to seek a degree later. I opted for the apprenticeship pathway, as I believed this path offered me the most options and would allow me to have a steady foothold in life that a degree alone (and potentially the debt that may come with it) would not.

I was enjoying success at the top of my class, until I was unfortunately involved in a life-altering car accident in 2013 that had me facing a lengthy rehabilitation period that spanned years. The injury left me physically unable to perform the work required of an Electrician, and without the college credits I would have received upon completing the apprenticeship, which meant that I was now essentially starting over from scratch, with a disability on top of that. As a result of various programs and supports, peer mentorship, and connecting and networking with others in the disability community, I was able to find work, first with a Center for Independent Living, and now with county government.

Maryland state government's efforts to remove requirements such as college degrees for jobs and instead focus on experience and skill for many positions make them a desirable employer for individuals such as myself. The Maryland as a Model Employer initiative created by this bill will continue to work to identify and remove barriers that inadvertently keep people like myself from obtaining State jobs. This program would offer me access and opportunities to advance my career in support of the state that supported me after my accident to become independent and financially self-sufficient.

I respectfully request your favorable report for House Bill 502.

Sincerely,

English Harper
Timonium, MD