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MAYOR

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**HB0502**

February 11, 2025

**TO:** Members of the House Appropriations Committee

**FROM:** Nina Themelis, Director of Mayor's Office of Government Relations

**RE:** House Bill 502 - Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy and Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative - Established

**POSITION: Support**

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill (HB) 502.

HB 502 establishes the Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy (ODEAP) which would develop and implement a plan to assist individuals living with disabilities in employment, training, and career readiness. The ODEAP would also collect data from state government to fulfill this duty and advance the Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative, a program established within HB 502 that promotes the recruitment, hiring, retention, and career advancement in state employment of people living with disabilities. In addition, the initiative would conduct outreach, deliver best practices training to state agencies, promote access of assistive technologies, gather performance metrics of hiring and retention, and produce a report on the adherence to the initiative related to individuals living with disabilities.

HB 502 implements an inclusive approach to state employment that would meaningfully improve individuals living with disabilities' access to employment opportunities, for which they may traditionally be excluded or overlooked. According to the Maryland Department of Disabilities 2020-2023 State Disabilities Plan Survey, 61% of respondents utilized Pre-Employment or Employment services from the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS); however, according to the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy, only 41% of Marylanders living with disabilities are employed. This represents a significant gap in the motivation to work amongst Maryland's disability community and the actual opportunity granted to them. The ODEAP and Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative would reduce this gap through direct work and policy recommendations, similar to Baltimore City's Mayor's Commission on Disabilities.

For the above reasons, the BCA respectfully requests a **favorable** committee report on HB 502.