



**DATE:** February 7, 2025

**COMMITTEE:** APPROPRIATIONS

**BILL NO:** House Bill 502

**BILL TITLE:** Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy and Maryland

**POSITION:** Support

**Kennedy Krieger Institute supports House Bill 502, establishment of the Office of Disability Employment Advancement.**

**Bill Summary:**

Establishing the Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy within the Department of Disabilities; establishing the Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative within the Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy to facilitate efforts that improve outcomes in the hiring, recruitment, retention, and advancement of people with disabilities in the State government workforce; and requiring the Office to report annually on the progress and outcomes of the Initiative.

**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, 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 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 an annual national conference and on-going events.

Kennedy Krieger Institute 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:**

Maryland has done outstanding work for the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in our community and meaningful services available to Marylanders; however, 80% of individuals that identify as having a disability are currently not part of the workforce, versus 37% of individuals who do not identify as having a disability. As an Employment First State, there is value in advancing employment within our state government, modeling an employment culture that is welcoming to individuals with disabilities, and collectively advancing employment for all Marylanders. By establishing this Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy, Maryland will advance employment for all, obtain crucial data, and identify strategies for successful and meaningful employment and retention of individuals with disabilities.

**Kennedy Krieger Institute requests a favorable report on House Bill 502.**