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Richard Keith Kaplowitz
Frederick, MD 21703

TESTIMONY ON HB#/0502 - POSITION: FAVORABLE

Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy and Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative – Established

TO: Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang and members of the Appropriations Committee

FROM: Richard Keith Kaplowitz

My name is Richard Keith Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3. I am submitting this testimony in support of HB#/0502, Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy and Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative – Established

According to the Harvard Business Review:

Employing people with disabilities is usually seen as a social cause—one best suited to nonprofits or the public sector. That is a mistake—and more important, a missed opportunity. In many industries innovative companies are demonstrating that including people with disabilities can lead to real competitive advantage, in four ways: (1) Disabilities often confer unique talents that make people better at particular jobs. (2) The presence of employees with disabilities elevates the culture of the entire organization, making it more collaborative and boosting productivity. (3) A reputation for inclusiveness enhances a firm’s value proposition with customers, who become more willing to build long-term relationships with the company. And (4) being recognized as socially responsible gives a firm an edge in the competition for capital and talent. ¹

However, “Governor Moore’s FY26dget includes **several significant cuts to services for people with intellectual and eodevelopmental disabilities (IDD)**, which will negatively affect their access to opportunities, their support systems’ financial security, and home- and community-based organizations ...” ²

Yet the Maryland government needs staffing to make government function. This bill makes it a policy in Maryland to consider people with disabilities as a resource for filling job openings and creating a framework for facilitating that process.

The Governor’s budget has created a ‘...risk of losing hard-fought progress in keeping individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities in their communities and out of institutions.

¹ <https://hbr.org/2023/07/disability-as-a-source-of-competitive-advantage>

² <https://thearccc.org/news/proposed-budget-cuts-hurt-marylanders-with-idd/>

“This is unacceptable,” said Ken Capone, policy director for The Arc Maryland. “We understand that the state is in a deficit, and we all need to tighten our belts, but this should not be done recklessly and without representation from the disability community.”³

This bill offers a way for the disability community to make progress integrating disabled individuals into the workforce. This bill would establish the Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy within the Department of Disabilities. It would make a statement that Maryland, in the words of the Governor, “leaves no one behind” by 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. Data will be collected, and the Office will be required to report annually on the progress and outcomes of the Initiative to guide its work and mission going forward.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB#/0502

³ <https://www.thebaltimorebanner.com/politics-power/state-government/disabilities-budget-cuts-rally-PP6YM4PLHNECNDVIJIPYHGXXHI/>