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February 4, 2025

The Honorable Ben Barnes
Chairman of the House Appropriations
121 House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: HB 502 - Office of Disability Employment Advancement
and Policy and Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative
- Established

Dear Chairman Barnes:

Thank you for the opportunity to enter this written testimony in support of House Bill 502 and the creation of Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy as a Model Employer Initiative.

Blind Industries and Services of Maryland ("BISM") is the largest employer of blind and low vision individuals in the State of Maryland. Currently, our best data shows that the unemployment rate for working age blind individuals is approximately seventy percent (70%) - an unconscionable number. At BISM, we are working towards lowering this statistic by empowering blind individuals on their journey to fulfilling and sustainable employment.

As a proud partner with Maryland Works in the Maryland State Preferred Provider Program, BISM is keenly aware of the challenges and barriers faced by individuals with disabilities in the hiring, retention and advancement of people with disabilities.

BISM supports the blind community - and the disabled community at large - and we believe that the State of Maryland can - and should - be a leader in providing stable and rewarding career opportunities and economic and personal independence to the disabled. As Governor Moore has said many times - no one should be left behind.

If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to communicate with me.

Sincerely,

Blind Industries and Services of Maryland

By:

Thomas D. Kohn
Vice President and Counsel