

The Honorable Finance Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
Senate Office Building  
11 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Support for Senate Bill 433 – The Model Employer Act, Establishing the Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy (ODEAP) within the Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDOD)

Dear Chair Beidle and Members of the Finance Committee,

As the Chief Executive Officer of Maryland Works, Inc., an organization dedicated to advancing employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities and other barriers to employment, I am writing to express my strong support for Senate Bill 433. Maryland Works is a statewide association of non-profit community service providers and individual workforce development professionals who provide job training, employment, and business ownership opportunities for people with disabilities and other barriers to employment. Maryland Works is also included in the State Preferred Provider Program. This bill is extremely important if we want to provide individuals with disabilities meaningful opportunities that will assist with preparing and obtaining employment-JOBS-CAREERS.

This legislation takes a critical step towards addressing the persistent underemployment of Marylanders with disabilities.

Maryland is fortunate to have a Governor, elected officials and State leadership who genuinely care and are invested in the well-being of all Marylanders. Governor Moore's pledge to leave no one behind is clearly demonstrated in this bill. The creation of the Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDOD) in 2004 signaled a commitment to improving the lives of Marylanders with disabilities. Over 20 years later the Department of Disabilities is guided by strong leadership and an unwavering commitment to support individuals with disabilities. This legislation builds upon that foundation by enhancing MDOD's role in coordinating employment-related initiatives across State agencies.

Maryland Works has had the privilege of working closely with the Maryland Department of Disabilities for many years in our mission to support the employment of individuals with disabilities. People with disabilities have historically faced significant barriers to employment, experiencing lower rates of labor force participation and earning potential compared to their non-disabled peers. Establishing the Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy will result in many positive outcomes.

- Assisting this untapped labor pool in securing employment obtaining careers with sustaining wages and growth opportunities, leading to greater economic independence and improved quality of life.
- Enhancing state workforce by fostering and leveraging the unique skills and perspectives of individuals

with disabilities.

- Setting an example and positioning Maryland as a leader in disability inclusion, attracting top talent from across the state and creating National Best Practices in State employment for individuals with disabilities.

SB 433 is a vital step towards creating a more equitable and inclusive Maryland for all. This legislation takes a critical step towards addressing the persistent underemployment of Marylanders with disabilities. By establishing the Office of Disability Employment Advancement Policy and implementing the Initiative, the State can demonstrate its commitment to employment for individuals with disabilities and inspire positive changes across the public and private sectors.

On behalf of Maryland Works and the communities we serve, I thank you for considering this important legislation. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can provide any additional information or support as the Committee deliberates.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mary Manzoni".

Mary Manzoni

Chief Executive Officer

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