



**Testimony of Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi
In Strong Support of SB0433 / HB0502
Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy and Maryland as a Model
Employer Initiative - Established
Before the Finance Committee
February 18, 2025**

Honorable Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Finance Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of SB0433 / HB0502. My name is Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi. As a person with dyslexia and ADHD and as a parent of a child with multiple developmental disabilities, I know firsthand both the challenges and the immense potential of individuals with disabilities in the workforce. I am also the co-founder of the Mizrahi Family Charitable Fund, which supports numerous disability organizations, and I led a Maryland-based disability nonprofit for nine years, focusing on disability employment.

Employment is about more than just a paycheck. It is about dignity, independence, and full participation in society. Unfortunately, despite significant progress in disability rights and inclusion, people with disabilities remain significantly underrepresented in the workforce. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the labor force participation rate for people with disabilities is consistently less than half that of their non-disabled peers. This is not due to a lack of talent or willingness to work but rather to systemic barriers that prevent equal access to employment opportunities.

That is why SB0433 / HB0502 is so critical. By establishing the Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy (ODEAP) within the Department of Disabilities, Maryland will take a meaningful step toward breaking down these barriers. This legislation will provide the structure and leadership necessary to expand opportunities for people with disabilities in the state workforce through the Maryland as a Model Employer (SAME) Initiative. This initiative will:

- Provide technical assistance to State agencies on disability hiring and retention best practices.
- Conduct outreach to job seekers with disabilities, including those who are not eligible for Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) programs.
- Offer grants to State agencies to help subsidize reasonable accommodations for new hires with disabilities.
- Support agencies in developing disability hiring and retention plans.
- Issue annual reports to the Governor and General Assembly on the progress made.

These efforts are not just about fairness—they are about economic growth. Studies have shown that companies and organizations that embrace disability inclusion outperform their peers in revenue generation, net income, and overall employee engagement. Hiring people with disabilities strengthens teams, improves problem-solving, and enhances workplace culture. Additionally, by expanding employment opportunities, Maryland can reduce reliance on social services and increase tax revenue, benefiting all residents.

Maryland has already demonstrated leadership in disability employment, but we must do more. This bill builds on the strong foundation established when the state created a cabinet-level Department of Disabilities in 2004, ensuring cross-agency collaboration to implement policies that support employment, job training, and career readiness for individuals with disabilities.

I commend Lt. Governor Aruna Miller, Secretary Carol A. Beatty, and the bill sponsors for championing this crucial initiative. I urge the committee to pass SB0433 / HB0502 and reaffirm Maryland's commitment to being a leader in disability employment.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome any questions you may have.

Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi

Co-Founder, The Mizrahi Family Charitable Fund

Disability Employment Advocate

Former CEO, Maryland-Based Disability Nonprofit