



Testimony of the Autism Society of Maryland (AUSOM)

In Support of SB433

By Kiana Fok, Graduate of the Autism Hiring Program, a program of the Autism Hiring Program

February 18, 2025

Members of the Committee,

My name is Kiana Fok, and I am testifying in favor of SB0433 on behalf of the Autism Society of Maryland.

Three years ago, I participated in the [Autism Hiring Program](#), a program created by the Autism Society that connects highly skilled Autistic jobseekers like me with employers in a desirable career. The program provided me with job skills like interviewing, creating resumes and cover letters, and networking to connections for future jobs. It fills a gap in services in Maryland to serve an untapped workforce of skilled Autistic adults who have high level, marketable skills but who have struggled to find and sustain employment. Candidates are all high school graduates, many of us with college degrees, but not receiving supports from DDA, DORS or an agency. At the same time, it connects employers to competent, capable employees like me, improving their bottom line while creating a more inclusive and neurodiverse work environment.

It is through this program that I got my current job with a law firm in Towson that provided me with a higher salary and benefits, allowing me to build my financial independence and confidence. I am responsible for assisting lawyers with various tasks and making sure the office is well stocked and organized. I am a college graduate and, prior to my participation in the program, worked at a warehouse and in retail with the hopes of making enough money to move out of my parents' home. Thanks to this opportunity, I was able to move into my own place with roommates, continuing my growth in maturity of learning how to manage my own schedule. And I am still connected to the Autism Hiring Program team and other participants and can go to them when I have questions or concerns about my job.

Having the Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy will help workers like me who are too often left behind while supporting and nurturing the onboarding of more employers like mine to hire them.

Please support SB433. Thank you.



About the Autism Hiring Program

The Autism Hiring Program advances workplace neurodiversity and acceptance, connecting businesses to an untapped workforce of skilled Autistic adults and targeting jobseekers not supported by existing systems.

Created in 2021 by the Autism Society of Maryland, it addresses the needs of Autistic adults who have high level, marketable skills but have struggled to secure and maintain desirable employment. On the business side, it connects employers to this competent, capable workforce, improving their bottom line while creating a more inclusive and neurodiverse work environment. The program is supported by the Howard County Workforce Development, Montgomery WorkSource, Anne Arundel Workforce Development Corp. and the U.S. Department of Labor and others.

Impactful: The results translate into meaningful career opportunities for skilled workers, access to talented employees for businesses, and a more inclusive workforce!

The need: The need for this program and others like it is massive with 700,000+ Autistic individuals transitioning into adulthood in the U.S. in the next decade. However, the overall rate of unemployment for those with Autism remains higher than those with other disabilities. And 85% of college grads affected by Autism are unemployed or under employed.

Focus on the individual: Our candidates are high school graduates with certifications, some college or college degrees. They engage in a 10-week program of group and individual sessions designed to build independence, social and essential workplace skills, assessing interests and encouraging self advocacy. We focus on the person with the goal of securing employment that fits candidates' skills sets and interests. Ongoing peer support meetings are an essential piece of the program.

Supports for employers: The Autism Hiring Program engages employers to ensure a good fit for candidates AND add to their bottom line. We provide training for managers and staff on Autism, neurodiversity, ADA compliance, inclusivity, and natural supports, creating a sustainable system through which they can hire and retain great candidates. Modeled on hiring programs run by large corporations, it's a great fit for those who could not or would not create a hiring program on their own.

For more information, visit <https://autismsocietymd.org/autism-hiring-program/> or contact linda.hoyt@autismsocietymd.org.