

**MDOD\_SB0433\_FAV\_02.18.25.pdf**

Uploaded by: Anne Blackfield

Position: FAV



DATE: February 18, 2025

BILL: SB 433 – Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy and Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative - Established

COMMITTEE: Finance

POSITION: Favorable

Dear Chair Beidle,

The Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDOD) is pleased to submit this letter in support of SB 433. This legislation creates the Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy within MDOD to support our work promoting employment, training, and career-readiness policies for youths and adults with disabilities.

The legislation also establishes the Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative under the newly created Office. This initiative is modelled on the State as a Model Employer Initiative, a national movement that ensures that state governments serve as model employers for private-sector businesses by committing to improve hiring, recruitment, retention, and advancement of people with disabilities in state government workforces.

Through this initiative, the Office will help recruit talented job seekers with disabilities for available State positions, work with State agencies to develop plans to hire and retain workers with disabilities, help State agencies identify and pay for reasonable accommodations for new State hires, and analyze the State's progress towards meeting its goals for including people with disabilities in the workforce. While all job seekers with disabilities will be welcome to participate in this initiative, the Office will have the flexibility to support individuals who are not eligible for other programs such as the vocational rehabilitation services offered through Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS).

Individuals with disabilities have been historically under-utilized in the workforce despite their great skill and unique perspective. Cultivating talent among Maryland's disabled population and matching these individuals with meaningful work is not just the right thing to do, but is also critical to filling vacant jobs and keeping Maryland at the forefront of innovation. To be competitive in the global economy, employers must use the important contributions of all workers, including those with disabilities.

We respectfully request a favorable report on SB 433. Thank you for your support of the many Marylanders with disabilities ready to help build the State's workforce and grow the economy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carol A. Beatty".

Carol A. Beatty, Secretary



# **SB 0433 Office of Disability Employment Advanceme**

Uploaded by: Caitlin McDonough

Position: FAV



**DATE:** February 3, 2025

**COMMITTEE:** FINANCE

**BILL NO:** Senate Bill 0433

**BILL TITLE:** Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy

**POSITION:** Support

**Kennedy Krieger Institute supports Senate Bill 0433, establishment of the Office of Disability Employment Advancement.**

**Bill Summary:**

Establishing the Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy within the Department of Disabilities; 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; and requiring the Office to report annually on the progress and outcomes of the Initiative.

**Background:**

Kennedy Krieger's Neurodiversity at Work program takes a multi-faceted approach to hiring and retaining individuals of all abilities as part of the workforce. Neurodiversity at Work is a collective impact initiative designed to create and support gainful employment for individuals with disabilities, providing economic benefit for businesses and the larger community. The Neurodiversity at Work program fosters integrated workplace settings where all individuals can experience success and independence. Currently the program includes several specialty initiatives CORE Foundations a Developmental Disabilities Administration Licensed Agency, HR pathways hiring program, training and education services, legislative efforts, research, transition consultation services, and planning for an annual national conference and on-going events.

Kennedy Krieger Institute is an inclusive employer that believes that individuals with disabilities have the skills, talents, and drive to contribute significantly to the workforce and to the broader community. A neurodiverse workforce benefits all.

**Rationale:**

Maryland has done outstanding work for the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in our community and meaningful services available to Marylanders; however, 80% of individuals that identify as having a disability are currently not part of the workforce versus 37% of individuals who do not identify as having a disability. As an Employment First State, there is value in advancing employment within our state government, modeling **belonging employment**, and collectively advancing employment for all Marylanders. All Marylanders should have the right and dignity to engage in meaningful employment and see those employed at all levels, representing all Marylanders. By establishing this Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy, Maryland will advance employment for all, obtain crucial data, and identify strategies for successful and meaningful employment and retention of individuals with disabilities.

**Kennedy Krieger Institute requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 0433.**

**MDOA Written Testimony - FAVORABLE - Office of Dis**

Uploaded by: Carmel Roques

Position: FAV



Wes Moore | Governor

Aruna Miller | Lt. Governor

Carmel Roques | Secretary

Date: February 14, 2025

Bill Number: SB433

Bill Title: Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy and Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative - Established

Committee: Senate Finance

**MDOA Position: FAVORABLE**

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The Department of Aging (MDOA) thanks the Chair and Committee members for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill (SB) 433 - Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy and Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative - Established.

The Maryland Department of Aging (MDOA) serves as Maryland's State Unit of Aging, administering federal funding for core programs, overseeing the Area Agency on Aging (AAA) network at the local level that provides services, and planning for Maryland's older adult population. Pursuant to an Executive Order, in January 2024, MDOA launched the Longevity-Ready Maryland Initiative,<sup>1</sup> which will build upon existing efforts across state agencies, private and philanthropic sectors, and other stakeholders to tackle real-life challenges throughout the lifespan, taking a whole-of-life and whole-of-government approach.

Establishing the Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy and the Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative will strengthen the state workforce's inclusivity for older workers and older workers with disabilities. As Maryland's older population continues to grow steadily, it is critical that more employers in Maryland adopt age-friendly policies and practices that value experience and accommodate diverse abilities. Doing so enhances financial stability, social engagement, the ability to live independently and makes it easier for older adults who are disabled to remain living in Maryland. This leadership from the state government will serve as an important model to other employers in Maryland while strengthening the state workforce.

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<sup>1</sup> More on Longevity-Ready MD Initiative available at: <https://aging.maryland.gov/Pages/LRM.aspx>



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Wes Moore | Governor

Aruna Miller | Lt. Governor

Carmel Roques | Secretary

For these reasons, the Department of Aging respectfully urges a favorable report for Senate Bill 433. If you have any questions, please contact Andrea Nunez, Legislative Director, at [andrea.nunez@maryland.gov](mailto:andrea.nunez@maryland.gov) or (443) 414-8183.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Carmel Roques".

Carmel Roques  
Secretary  
Maryland Department of Aging

# **SB 433 Office of Disability Employment Advancement**

Uploaded by: Catherine OMalley

Position: FAV



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BILL NO: Senate Bill 433  
TITLE: Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy and Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative - Established  
COMMITTEE: Finance  
HEARING DATE: February 14, 2025  
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

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The Women's Law Center of Maryland is a non-profit legal services organization whose mission is to ensure the physical safety, economic security, and bodily autonomy of women in Maryland. One of our programs provides the only free hotline in the state to consult with a plaintiff (i.e. labor-side) employment law attorney. Demand greatly outpaces our ability to staff the hotline with volunteers, and disability accommodations/termination/etc. is a top concern each shift. We support Senate Bill 433's establishment of an Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy as well as the Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative because every indication – including our own call statistics, U.S. Department of Labor data, etc. – signals that the number of working-age disabled Americans is growing, and with federal employers ending their “DEI” (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) practices, we see this bill as creating a unique advantage for the state of Maryland to attract some of the nation's top talent and investment.

Disabled people in this country were denied employment on the basis of their disability until the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. Despite the legal protections afforded by the ADA, disabled adults still face significant employment discrimination. In 2024, the labor force participation rate for Americans with disabilities was less than half that of their able-bodied peers (24.7% vs. 67.8%), and unemployment rates were double (7.3% vs. 3.7%) according to data from the U.S. Department of Labor. Recent CDC Data on Disability Impacts (from Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Data – BRFSS, 2022) revealed that 24% of adults in Maryland reported having a disability in 2022. Older Americans, women, and particularly women of color are both more likely to be disabled and face discriminatory hiring practices due to this and other protected statuses (age, race, sex, etc.). Maryland invests so much in our highly-skilled workforce – ranking #2 in human capital investment per the Milken Institute, State Technology and Science Index, 2022 – that the Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative can only improve our ranking by eliminating barriers for job seekers and employees with disabilities.

Today, advances in assistive technology such as web-based systems, artificial intelligence, autonomous vehicles, and more have created new flexible employment options for people with disabilities, and Maryland must capitalize on this opportunity for both economic and social justice in promoting the recruitment, hiring, retention, and career advancement of people with disabilities across the state government. The Maryland Department of Commerce's website boasts an equitable, robust and competitive economy, citing #1 rankings across categories including best state for gender equality, minority employment, minority-owned businesses, and more. We want to see Maryland rank #1 in employment for persons with disabilities as well.

National trends point to U.S. demographic changes towards a more aged and disabled population. SB 433 positions Maryland to capitalize on these shifts by creating an Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy and launching the Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative to create not only an enabling environment for disabled workers, but one that results in the most talented and merit-based employment pipeline in the nation.

*The Women's Law Center of Maryland is a non-profit legal services organization whose mission is to ensure the physical safety, economic security, and bodily autonomy of women in Maryland. Our mission is advanced through direct legal services, information and referral hotlines, and statewide advocacy.*

# **SB0433\_Maryland\_as\_a\_Model\_Employer\_Initiative\_MLC**

Uploaded by: Cecilia Plante

Position: FAV



## TESTIMONY FOR SB0433

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

**Bill Sponsor:** President

**Committee:** Finance

**Organization Submitting:** Maryland Legislative Coalition

**Person Submitting:** Cecilia Plante, co-chair

**Position:** FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in strong support of SB0433 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of activists - individuals and grassroots groups in every district in the state. We are unpaid citizen lobbyists and our Coalition supports well over 30,000 members.

One of the things that makes Maryland such a great state to live in is how we treat other people, especially people who are different from us and who have different challenges. We support a population that contains such diversity of culture, religion, experience and capability.

This bill, if enacted, would put the state in a position to lead by example in hiring and supporting people with disabilities. It establishes the Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy within the Department of Disabilities. That Office would be responsible for promoting the recruitment, hiring, retention and career advancement of people with disabilities across the state. It would also set policy within the government that would establish best practices and reduce barriers for job seekers.

This is what Maryland is – a place where everyone can be successful.

We strongly support this bill and recommend a **FAVORABLE** report in committee.

# **Freedom Center - SB 433 Support Letter.pdf**

Uploaded by: Chris Kelter

Position: FAV



1890 N. Market Street \* Suite # 203 \* Frederick, MD 21701

(P) 301-846-7811 | (F) 301-846-9070 | [advocate@thefreedomcenter-md.org](mailto:advocate@thefreedomcenter-md.org) | [www.thefreedomcenter-md.org](http://www.thefreedomcenter-md.org)

## **SB 433: Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy and Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative - Established**

### **Testimony of The Freedom Center**

#### **SUPPORT – Favorable**

Senate Finance Committee, February 18, 2025

The Freedom Center is one of the seven Maryland-based Centers for Independent Living (CIL). CILs are created by federal law. CILs work to enhance the civil rights and quality of services for people with disabilities. CILs are located throughout Maryland and are operated by and for people with disabilities. CILs provide Information and Referral, Advocacy, Peer Support, Independent Living Skills training, and Transition Services to individuals with disabilities in their communities.

The Freedom Center submits this written testimony in **support** of SB 433.

SB 433 establishes the Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy within the Department of Disabilities to address the training, career readiness and employment of individuals with disabilities. Additionally, the bill establishes the Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative within the newly created Office to facilitate efforts that improve outcomes in the hiring, recruitment, retention, and advancement of people with disabilities in the State government workforce.

People with disabilities are underrepresented in the workforce. The U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics reported in December 2024 that the Labor Force Participation Rate for people without a disability at 77.7% while the same rate for people with a disability at 41.3%. This rate is calculated as the labor force (sum of employed and unemployed) divided by the entire population (civilian, non-institutionalized).

People with disabilities face significant barriers to employment. These barriers include but are not limited to lack of education or applicable training, lack of transportation, an employer's unwillingness to provide accommodations, attitudes of employer or coworkers, lack of job counseling and loss of government assistance.

The Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy will implement the strategies in the Maryland State Disability Plan and support statewide policies related to the training, career readiness and employment of people with disabilities.

The Council of State Governments has determined that state governments can play an important role in advancing the recruitment, hiring, retention and advancement of people with disabilities through their own employment policies. The Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative will generate policies and evidence of best practices that can be applied to other employers.

Increasing quality employment opportunities for people with disabilities will lead to more self-sufficiency and less reliance on government assistance and community resources.

The Freedom Center appreciates the consideration of these comments.

The Freedom Center strongly **supports** SB 433 and requests a favorable vote.

**Contact Information:**

Dave Drezner  
Executive Director  
The Freedom Center  
[ddrezner@thefreedomcenter-md.org](mailto:ddrezner@thefreedomcenter-md.org)  
301-447-0164

**IL Written Testimony - SB 433 - Favorable.pdf**

Uploaded by: Chris Kelter

Position: FAV



**SB 433: Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy and Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative - Established**

**Testimony of the Maryland Independent Living Network**

**SUPPORT – Favorable**

Senate Finance Committee, February 18, 2025

The Maryland Independent Living Network is a coalition of the Maryland Statewide Independent Living Council and the seven Maryland-based Centers for Independent Living (CIL). CILs are created by federal law. CILs work to enhance the civil rights and quality of services for people with disabilities. There are seven CILs located throughout Maryland, operated by and for people with disabilities. CILs provide Information and Referral, Advocacy, Peer Support, Independent Living Skills training, and Transition Services to individuals with disabilities in their communities.

The Independent Living Network submits this written testimony in **support** of SB 433.

SB 433 establishes the Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy within the Department of Disabilities to address the training, career readiness and employment of individuals with disabilities. Additionally, the bill establishes the Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative within the newly created Office to facilitate efforts that improve outcomes in the hiring, recruitment, retention, and advancement of people with disabilities in the State government workforce.

People with disabilities are underrepresented in the workforce. The U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics reported in December 2024 that the Labor Force Participation Rate for people without a disability at 77.7% while the same rate for people with a disability at 41.3%. This rate is calculated as the labor force (sum of employed and unemployed) divided by the entire population (civilian, non-institutionalized).

People with disabilities face significant barriers to employment. These barriers include but are not limited to lack of education or applicable training, lack of transportation, an employer's unwillingness to provide accommodations, attitudes of employer or coworkers, lack of job counseling and loss of government assistance.



The Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy will implement the strategies in the Maryland State Disability Plan and support statewide policies related to the training, career readiness and employment of people with disabilities.

The Council of State Governments has determined that state governments can play an important role in advancing the recruitment, hiring, retention and advancement of people with disabilities through their own employment policies. The Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative will generate policies and evidence of best practices that can be applied to other employers.

Increasing quality employment opportunities for people with disabilities will lead to more self-sufficiency and less reliance on government assistance and community resources.

The Maryland Independent Living Network appreciates the consideration of these comments.

The Maryland Independent Living Network strongly **supports** SB 433 and requests a favorable vote.

**Contact Information:**

Chris Kelter, Executive Director  
Accessible Resources for Independence  
443-713-3914  
[ckelter@arinow.org](mailto:ckelter@arinow.org)

Danielle Bustos, MDYLF Coordinator  
Independence Now  
240-898-2189  
[dbustos@innow.org](mailto:dbustos@innow.org)

# **SB 433 Maryland As Model Employer February 18^J 20**

Uploaded by: Cody Drinkwater

Position: FAV



## People on the Go of Maryland

SB 433, cross-filed with HB 502

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

*Establishing the Office of Disability Employment and Policy within the Department of Disabilities; 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; and requiring the Office to report annually on the progress and outcomes of the Initiative.*

Position: Support

February 18<sup>th</sup> 2025, 1:00 pm

Sponsored by the President by request of the Administration,  
and by Senators [Augustine](#), [Charles](#), [Ellis](#), [Henson](#), [Hettleman](#), [Kagan](#), [King](#), and  
[Lam](#)

Assigned to: Finance Committee

Written by Cody Drinkwater

Policy Coordinator - People On the Go of Maryland

Honorable Chairperson, and distinguished members of the Appropriations  
Committee:

People On the Go of Maryland (POG) is a statewide self-advocacy organization, run for and by those with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (IDD), and our mission is to promote self advocacy throughout the state.

POG respectfully offers this written testimony in support of SB 433, for the following reasons:

1. The Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative would promote the recruitment, hiring, retention, and career advancement of people with disabilities across State government.
2. People with disabilities need and want to work, earn real wages with benefits, and thrive in Maryland's economy. POG notes that:
  - According to public data, while 79% of Marylanders without disabilities are employed, **only 45% of Marylanders with disabilities** (ages 18-64) **are currently employed.**
  - People with disabilities, whether physical, intellectual, or developmental, are historically unemployed or under-employed. **27.6% of people currently supported by DDA providers, work in individual competitive jobs, and only 35% of those work more than 20 hours per week.**
  - According to the Maryland Chamber of Commerce, Maryland is facing a **severe worker shortage, with only 40 workers available for every 100 jobs.** Tapping into the talent pool of individuals with disabilities would help to fill these gaps.
3. As this Initiative is modeled on the nationally-recognized State as a Model Employer (SAME) guidelines, Maryland State government will serve as a model for private-sector business, by committing to improve hiring, recruitment, retention, and advancement of people with disabilities in the State workforce.

Therefore, People on the Go respectfully asks for a favorable report on SB 433. We would request that any funds appropriated for this Initiative not be taken

away from those already specified for existing services and supports for Marylanders with disabilities.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Should you have any questions. Please contact Cody Drinkwater or Mat Rice.

Thank you,

Cody Drinkwater, Policy Coordinator

M: 443-923-9593 E: [cody@pogmd.org](mailto:cody@pogmd.org)

Mat Rice, Executive Director

M: 410-925-5706 E: [mat@pogmd.org](mailto:mat@pogmd.org)

**Maryland Catholic Conference\_FAV\_SB433.pdf**

Uploaded by: Diane Arias

Position: FAV



MARYLAND  
CATHOLIC  
CONFERENCE

**February 18, 2025**

**Senate Bill 433**

**Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy and Maryland as a  
Model Employer Initiative - Established  
Senate Finance Committee**

**Position: Favorable**

The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals, and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

**Senate Bill 433** would establish the Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy within the Department of Disabilities; 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; and requiring the Office to report annually on the progress and outcomes of the Initiative.

This office establishment is essential to ensuring equitable access to employment for individuals with disabilities. It would support their career advancement and development by establishing a dedicated department focused on recruitment, hiring, and retention. Additionally, this department could provide training for agencies that assist job seekers, helping connect individuals with disabilities to suitable positions. The establishment of this department would further acknowledge the equal dignity of human persons regardless of disabilities. It is our responsibility to ensure active participation in civil community through employment for individuals that are unique and unrepeatable.<sup>1</sup>

The proposed legislation would address the workplace barriers that employees with disabilities often face. By establishing this office, it would create a resource to ensure proper accommodation is provided and necessary assistive technology is available. Furthermore, the office would promote workforce diversity and prepare employers to successfully hire and retain

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<sup>1</sup> <https://capp-usa.org/fratelli-tutti/>

individuals with disabilities.<sup>2</sup> People with disabilities are a vital part of our society, and we must create pathways within our communities to help them achieve their career aspirations.

For these reasons, the Maryland Catholic Conference asks for a favorable report on **SB 433**.

Thank you for your consideration.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://leagueforpeople.org/program/employment-services/>



**EH-SB433-FAV-02.18.25.pdf**

Uploaded by: English Harper

Position: FAV

DATE: February 18, 2025  
BILL: SB 433 – Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy and  
Maryland as a Model Employer - Established  
COMMITTEE: Finance  
POSITION: Favorable

Dear Chair Beidle,

My name is English Harper, and I am writing in support of Senate Bill 433.

Currently, I work as an Information & Assistance Specialist for the Anne Arundel County Department of Aging & Disabilities' Maryland Access Point office. However, I am writing this letter in my capacity as a private citizen, not on behalf of my employer. SB 433 would offer me additional employment opportunities, which I would greatly appreciate, given the challenges and setbacks I faced when starting my career again following my spinal cord injury.

Exiting high school, I had the option to go to college or to become an Electrician's Apprentice, which would provide me not only with valuable, paid experience and a path to a Journeyman Electrician's license, but with 60 college credits upon completion as well, should I opt to seek a degree later. I opted for the apprenticeship pathway, as I believed this path offered me the most options and would allow me to have a steady foothold in life that a degree alone (and potentially the debt that may come with it) would not.

I was enjoying success at the top of my class, until I was unfortunately involved in a life-altering car accident in 2013 that had me facing a lengthy rehabilitation period that spanned years. The injury left me physically unable to perform the work required of an Electrician, and without the college credits I would have received upon completing the apprenticeship, which meant that I was now essentially starting over from scratch, with a disability on top of that. As a result of various programs and supports, peer mentorship, and connecting and networking with others in the disability community, I was able to find work, first with a Center for Independent Living, and now with county government.

Maryland state government's efforts to remove requirements such as college degrees for jobs and instead focus on experience and skill for many positions make them a desirable employer for individuals such as myself. The Maryland as a Model Employer initiative created by this bill will continue to work to identify and remove barriers that inadvertently keep people like myself from obtaining State jobs. This program would offer me access and opportunities to advance my career in support of the state that supported me after my accident to become independent and financially self-sufficient.

I respectfully request your favorable report for Senate Bill 433.

Sincerely,

English Harper  
Timonium, MD

**disability employment in MD testimony final PDF.pd**

Uploaded by: Jennifer Mizrahi

Position: FAV



**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

**2025 TCC SB 433 Senate Side.pdf**

Uploaded by: Jennifer Navabi

Position: FAV



**Committee:** Senate Finance Committee

**Bill Number:** Senate Bill 433

**Title:** Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy and Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative

**Hearing Date:** February 18, 2025

**Position:** Support

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The Coordinating Center supports *Senate Bill 433 – Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy and Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative – Established*. The bill creates the Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy under the Department of Disabilities.

The Coordinating Center provides care coordination to nearly 10,000 Marylanders annually to individuals enrolled in Maryland Medicaid programs, including the Community First Choice Program, and other home and community-based service waivers and programs. Our goal is to support our clients in living as independently as possible within their own communities. Many of our clients with disabilities aspire to work, yet they face significant barriers, such as limited job opportunities, insufficient support for workplace accommodations, and transportation challenges. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate for people with disabilities was twice the rate as for people without disabilities.<sup>i</sup> The Coordinating Center believes that Maryland can be in the forefront of addressing this issue with the establishment of the Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy.

Please vote favorably on this legislation. If we can provide any further information, please contact Robyn Elliott at [relliott@policypartners.net](mailto:relliott@policypartners.net).

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/disabl.pdf>

# **SB 433 Favorable.pdf**

Uploaded by: June Chung

Position: FAV



**STATE OF MARYLAND  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR**

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**WES MOORE.**  
GOVERNOR

STATE HOUSE  
100 STATE CIRCLE  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401-1925  
(410) 974-3901  
(TOLL FREE) 1-800-811-8336

TTY USERS CALL VIA MD RELAY

February 18, 2025

The Honorable Pam Beidle  
Chair, Finance Committee  
3 East Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Senate Bill 433 - Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy and Maryland As A Model Employer Initiative - Letter of Support

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and Members of the Finance Committee:

On behalf of the Governor, I respectfully request a favorable report on Senate Bill 433, Office of Disability Employment and Advancement and Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative. As part of the Governor's focus on spurring economic growth, this legislation establishes a new office and initiative under the Department of Disabilities to provide additional support and tap into Maryland's disability community for meeting workforce needs.

The Office of Disability Employment Advancement will develop and implement strategies supporting hiring, training, and retention of persons with disabilities, and the Model Employer Initiative codifies the State's commitment to the national movement to push state governments to act as model employers in improving hiring, recruitment, and retention. The bill is designed to contribute to economic growth and support individuals with disabilities in working for the State. I urge a favorable report.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have questions, please contact June Chung, Deputy Legislative Officer at [june.chung@maryland.gov](mailto:june.chung@maryland.gov).

Sincerely,

June Chung  
Deputy Legislative Officer

**Melwood Letter of Support for SB0433 HB0502.pdf**

Uploaded by: Katie Missimer

Position: FAV

Senator Bill Ferguson  
President of the Senate  
H-107 State House  
100 State Circle  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Delegate Adrienne A. Jones  
Speaker of the House  
H-101 State House  
100 State Circle  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear President Ferguson and Speaker Jones

Melwood Inc. is one of the nation's leading advocates, employers, and service providers for people with disabilities and their caregivers. Comprised of a family of companies, including Melwood Enterprises and Melwood Community Services, Melwood Inc. employs more than 1,600 workers – over 900 of whom are people with disabilities. We offer employment, job placement, job training, life skills for independence, support services, and youth and community recreational services to more than 3,000 people each year. For more information, visit [www.Melwood.org](http://www.Melwood.org).

Melwood would like to express our support for SB0433/HB0502 – Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy and Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative. According to the 2022 American Community Survey there were approximately 350,000 working age disabled individuals living in the state of Maryland. Of those 48.9% are in employment, leaving more than 50% of disabled Marylanders not engaged in employment activities. People without disabilities in Maryland have an employment rate of 81.4%.

SB0433/HB0502 look to address this gap by creating an Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy and an initiative to establish Maryland as a model employer for people with disabilities. All of these are positive steps to increase employment among a chronically un- and under-employed population.

Melwood supports passage of this legislation and urges the committees to favorably report this legislation. You can contact Katie Missimer, Director, Government Relations ([kmissimer@melwood.org](mailto:kmissimer@melwood.org)) if you have any questions.

Regards,  
Jewelyn Cosgrove  
Vice President, Government and Public Relations

# **SB433 Testimony.pdf**

Uploaded by: Madelin Martinez

Position: FAV

**Senate Bill 433**  
**Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy and Maryland as a Model  
Employer Initiative – Established**

Finance  
February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
**Support**

**Catholic Charities of Baltimore supports SB433**, which will establish the Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy within Maryland's Department of Disabilities. The new office will oversee strategies for disability employment and training, while the Initiative will specifically focus on improving the recruitment, hiring, retention, and advancement of people with disabilities within state government.

For a century, Catholic Charities has provided care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. We accompany Marylanders as they age with dignity, support their pursuit of employment and career advancement, heal from trauma and addiction, achieve independence, prepare for educational success, and welcome immigrant neighbors into Maryland communities.

As Maryland's largest private provider of human services, we see firsthand the barriers our communities face in achieving their full potential. According to the 2019 Annual Disability Statistics Compendium, Maryland faces a stark 37 percentage point employment gap between working-age people with disabilities (40.3% employed) and those without disabilities (78.9% employed), highlighting the critical need for systemic change in employment practices.<sup>1</sup>

In line with Catholic Charities' mission and focus areas, we support SB433 for two key reasons:

1. As an organization that serves people with disabilities and helps them work toward independence, we see firsthand how critical employment opportunities are for their financial security and dignity. Creating a dedicated office to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities will help expand opportunities for our clients to achieve independence through meaningful careers in state government.
2. Our extensive experience providing both disability services and employment programs has shown us that systemic barriers often prevent qualified individuals with disabilities from accessing and advancing in careers. This Initiative will help break down these barriers in state government employment while setting an example for other employers to follow, creating lasting positive change for the communities we serve.

**For these reasons, Catholic Charities of Baltimore respectfully urges the committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 433.**

Submitted By: Madelin Martinez, Assistant Director of Advocacy

1. Data source: 2019 Annual Disability Statistics Compendium / American Community Survey (2018) <https://apse.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/MD-Dis-Compend-Summary.pdf>

# **SB 433 Letter of Support.pdf**

Uploaded by: Mary Manzoni

Position: FAV

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 that reads "Mary Manzoni". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mary Manzoni

Chief Executive Officer

Maryland Works, Inc.

Marym@mdworks.com

Office: 410.381.8660

Cell: 443.831.7867



**SB 433 - MDH -FIN - LOS (1).pdf**

Uploaded by: Meghan Lynch

Position: FAV



*Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H., Secretary*

February 18, 2025

The Honorable Pamela Beidle  
Chair, Finance Committee  
3 East Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**Re: Senate Bill (SB) 433 - Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy and Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative - Established - Letter of Support**

Dear Chair Beidle and Committee Members:

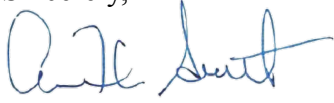
The Maryland Department of Health (Department) respectfully submits this letter of support for Senate Bill (SB) 433 - Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy and Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative - Established. SB 433 would create an office in the Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDOD) to support employment for people with disabilities, and would create an initiative to promote employment of people with disabilities in State government.

In its programs for people with disabilities, including the 1915(c) Medicaid waiver programs operated by the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA), which particularly serve individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, the Department emphasizes the importance of competitive, integrated employment. DDA currently funds services such as career development and exploration, as well as ongoing supports, to promote employment opportunities for all individuals in services who want to seek employment in their communities. The Department welcomes the opportunity to collaborate with MDOD in the further promotion of employment for people with disabilities in the State.

Further, Maryland is an Employment First state, meaning that Maryland supports the principles that all people have the right to explore the full range of employment options, and that all people have the right to earn a living wage in a job of their choosing, based on their unique talents, gifts, skills, and interests. State government employment within Maryland should take the lead in promoting these values, and the employment of individuals with disabilities in State government is a key step towards achieving employment equality and community integration. For these reasons, the Department supports the passage of SB 433.

If you would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact Sarah Case-Herron, Director of Governmental Affairs, at [sarah.case-herron@maryland.gov](mailto:sarah.case-herron@maryland.gov).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Laura Herrera Scott". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Laura" being the most prominent.

Laura Herrera Scott, MD, MPH  
Secretary

# Testimony - SB433.pdf

Uploaded by: Melissa Rosenberg

Position: FAV



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.

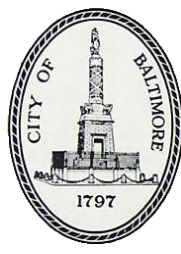
**Supports for employers:** The Autism Hiring Program engages employers to ensure a good fit for candidates AND add to their bottom line. We provide training for managers and staff on Autism, neurodiversity, ADA compliance, inclusivity, and natural supports, creating a sustainable system through which 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](mailto:linda.hoyt@autismsocietymd.org).

**SB0433-FIN-SUPP.pdf**

Uploaded by: Nina Themelis

Position: FAV



BRANDON M. SCOTT  
MAYOR

*Office of Government Relations  
88 State Circle  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401*

**SB433**

February 18, 2025

**TO:** Members of the Senate Finance Committee

**FROM:** Nina Themelis, Director of Mayor's Office of Government Relations

**RE:** Senate Bill 433 - Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy and Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative - Established

**POSITION: Support**

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** Senate Bill (SB) 433.

SB 433 establishes the Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy (ODEAP) which would develop and implement a plan to assist individuals living with disabilities in employment, training, and career readiness. The ODEAP would also collect data from state government to fulfill this duty and advance the Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative, a program established within SB 433 that promotes the recruitment, hiring, retention, and career advancement in state employment of people living with disabilities. In addition, the initiative would conduct outreach, deliver best practices training to state agencies, promote access of assistive technologies, gather performance metrics of hiring and retention, and produce a report on the adherence to the initiative related to individuals living with disabilities.

SB 433 implements an inclusive approach to state employment that would meaningfully improve individuals living with disabilities' access to employment opportunities, for which they may traditionally be excluded or overlooked. According to the Maryland Department of Disabilities 2020-2023 State Disabilities Plan Survey, 61% of respondents utilized Pre-Employment or Employment services from the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS); however, according to the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy, only 41% of Marylanders living with disabilities are employed. This represents a significant gap in the motivation to work amongst Maryland's disability community and the actual opportunity granted to them. The ODEAP and Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative would reduce this gap through direct work and policy recommendations, similar to Baltimore City's Mayor's Commission on Disabilities.

For the above reasons, the BCA respectfully requests a **favorable** committee report on SB 433.



# **SB433.Council.Support.pdf**

Uploaded by: Rachel London

Position: FAV



## Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council

CREATING CHANGE • IMPROVING LIVES

### Senate Finance Committee

February 4, 2025

### **SB 433: Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy and Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative – Established**

Position: **Support**

The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council (DD Council), a statewide public policy organization led by people with developmental disabilities and their families, creates change to make it possible for people with developmental disabilities to lead the lives they want with the support they need. **By increasing employment opportunities and promoting economic mobility for more Marylanders**, SB 433 is another step to make sure that happens.

#### **What does this legislation do?**

- Establishes the Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy within the Department of Disabilities
- Creates the Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative to promote the recruitment, hiring, retention, and career advancement of people with disabilities across State government.

#### **WHY is it important?**

- **People with developmental disabilities need and want to work, earn real wages with benefits, and thrive in Maryland's economy.** The Initiative includes activities that support people with disabilities to get and keep jobs in State government. This includes outreach, recruitment, supportive resources, identification of barriers and help to remove them, strategic planning, and data tracking.
- **More work is needed to close the employment gap for people with disabilities.**
  - Only **45% of Marylanders with disabilities** (ages 18-64) are employed
  - **79% of those without disabilities** are employed
- **People with developmental disabilities are historically underemployed and unemployed.** According to public data:
  - **27.6% of people supported by DDA providers worked in individual competitive jobs, and only 35% of those people worked more than 20 hours per week.**

- **This bill helps many Marylanders while also addressing workforce shortages.** Maryland faces a **severe worker shortage**, with only **40 workers available for every 100 jobs** (Maryland Chamber of Commerce). Tapping into the underutilized talent pool of individuals with disabilities can help fill these gaps.

- 24% of Marylanders have a disability.

Contact: Rachel London, Executive Director: [RLondon@md-council.org](mailto:RLondon@md-council.org)

**SB433.DDCoalition.FAV.pdf**

Uploaded by: Rachel London

Position: FAV



# MARYLAND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COALITION

Dedicated to the rights and quality of life for people with developmental disabilities in Maryland

Senate Finance Committee

February 4, 2025

## **SB 433: Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy and Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative – Established**

Position: **Support**



8601 Robert Fulton Dr  
Suite 140  
Columbia, MD 21046

The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Coalition (DD Coalition) is comprised of five statewide organizations that are committed to improving the opportunities and outcomes for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and their families. As such, the DD Coalition supports SB 433.



1500 Union Avenue  
Suite 2000  
Baltimore, MD 21211

### **What does this legislation do?**

- Establishes the Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy within the Department of Disabilities
- Creates the Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative to promote the recruitment, hiring, retention, and career advancement of people with disabilities across State government.



8835 Columbia 100 Pky  
Suite P  
Columbia, MD 21044

### **WHY is this legislation important?**

- **More needs to be done to address employment gaps.** People with developmental disabilities need and want to work, earn real wages with benefits, and thrive in Maryland's economy.
  - Only **45% of Marylanders with disabilities** (ages 18-64) are employed
  - **79% of those without disabilities** are employed
- **More needs to be done to improve economic outcomes.** People with intellectual and developmental disabilities are historically underemployed and unemployed. According to public data:
  - **27.6% of people supported by DDA providers worked in individual competitive jobs, and only 35% of those people worked more than 20 hours per week.**
- **This bill helps Marylanders with disabilities while helping with workforce shortages.** Maryland faces a **severe worker shortage**, with only **40 workers available for every 100 jobs** (Maryland Chamber of Commerce). Tapping into the underutilized talent pool of individuals with disabilities can help fill these gaps.
- **Creates a more inclusive workforce.** Modeled on the nationally recognized State as a Model Employer (SAME) Initiative, Maryland State government will serve as a model employer for private-sector business by committing to improve hiring, recruitment, retention, and advancement of people with disabilities in the State workforce.



**Maryland Developmental  
Disabilities Council**  
CREATING CHANGE · IMPROVING LIVES

217 E Redwood Street  
Suite 1300  
Baltimore, MD 21202



7000 Tudsbury Road  
Windsor Mill, MD 21244

Contact: Rachel London, Chair, DD Coalition: [RLondon@md-council.org](mailto:RLondon@md-council.org)

# **Testimony in support of SB0433 - Office of Disabil**

Uploaded by: Richard KAP Kaplowitz

Position: FAV

SB0433\_RichardKaplowitz\_FAV

02/18/2025

Richard Keith Kaplowitz

Frederick, MD 21703

**TESTIMONY ON SB#/0433 - POSITION: FAVORABLE**

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

**TO:** Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes and members of the Finance 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 SB#/0433, 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. <sup>1</sup>

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 ...” <sup>2</sup>

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.

SB0433\_RichardKaplowitz\_FAV

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

<sup>2</sup> <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.”<sup>3</sup>

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 SB#/0433**

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



# 2025 TCC SB 433 Senate Side.pdf

Uploaded by: Robyn Elliott

Position: FAV



**Committee:** Senate Finance Committee

**Bill Number:** Senate Bill 433

**Title:** Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy and Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative

**Hearing Date:** February 18, 2025

**Position:** Support

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The Coordinating Center supports *Senate Bill 433 – Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy and Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative – Established*. The bill creates the Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy under the Department of Disabilities.

The Coordinating Center provides care coordination to nearly 10,000 Marylanders annually to individuals enrolled in Maryland Medicaid programs, including the Community First Choice Program, and other home and community-based service waivers and programs. Our goal is to support our clients in living as independently as possible within their own communities. Many of our clients with disabilities aspire to work, yet they face significant barriers, such as limited job opportunities, insufficient support for workplace accommodations, and transportation challenges. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate for people with disabilities was twice the rate as for people without disabilities.<sup>i</sup> The Coordinating Center believes that Maryland can be in the forefront of addressing this issue with the establishment of the Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy.

Please vote favorably on this legislation. If we can provide any further information, please contact Robyn Elliott at [relliott@policypartners.net](mailto:relliott@policypartners.net).

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/disabl.pdf>

**SB0433-Ofc Dis Employment Advancement (MCCR-FAV).p**

Uploaded by: Spencer Dove

Position: FAV



# State of Maryland Commission on Civil Rights

*Respect...Integrity...Effective Communication*

**Governor**  
Wes Moore

**Lt. Governor**  
Aruna Miller

**Commission Chair**  
Stephanie Suerth, MPA,  
CCEP

**Commission Vice Chair**  
Janssen E. Evelyn, Esq.

**Commissioners**  
Eileen M. Levitt, SPHR,  
SHRM-SCP  
Angela Scott, Esq.  
Magdalena S. Navarro,  
MSc  
Jeff Rosen  
Gina McKnight-Smith,  
PharmD, MBA  
Noah Thomas Metheny,  
Esq., MPH

**Officers**  
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Yolanda F. Sonnier

**Assistant Director**  
Nicolette S. Young

**General Counsel**  
Glendora C. Hughes

**Education and  
Outreach Director**  
Candice Gray

## **Senate Bill 433 – Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy and Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative – Established Position: Support**

Dear Chairperson Beidle, Vice Chairperson Hayes, and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

The Maryland Commission on Civil Rights (“MCCR”; “The Commission”) is the State agency responsible for enforcing Maryland’s laws prohibiting discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, state contracts, commercial leasing, and health services based on race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, marital status, familial status, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, physical and mental disability, source of income, and military status.

Senate Bill 433 is an important bill aimed at creating opportunities for individuals with disabilities seeking employment in State government. The bill establishes within the Department of Disabilities (“MDOD”) the Office of Disability Employment Advancement & Policy (“Office”). The bill also creates the Maryland as a Model Employer Initiative which will be implemented and overseen by the Office.

As Maryland’s lead agency on civil and human rights, MCCR reports annually on complaints received alleging unlawful employment discrimination based on disability. Historically, disability shares a spot alongside race, retaliation, and harassment, as the top protected classes and issues identified within our complaints. Specifically, disability was identified 601 times in FY2022, 627 times in FY2023, and 531 times in FY2024.

SB433 will have a meaningful impact in Maryland leading by example. While creating opportunities and eliminating barriers for employment within State government is a win for our professionals dedicated to serving the public, it will also have a profound impact on creating similar equities, opportunities, and access within the private sector.

For these reasons, the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights urges a favorable vote on SB433. Thank you for your time and consideration of the information contained in this letter. MCCR looks forward to the continued opportunity to work with you to promote and improve fair housing and civil rights in Maryland.

*“Our vision is to have a State that is free from any trace of unlawful discrimination.”*

William Donald Schaefer Tower, 6 Saint Paul Street, Suite 900, Baltimore, Maryland 21202-1631  
Phone: 410-767-8600 · Toll Free: 1-800-637-6247 · Maryland Relay: 711 · Fax: 410-333-1841  
Website: [mccr.maryland.gov](http://mccr.maryland.gov) · E-Mail: [mccr@maryland.gov](mailto:mccr@maryland.gov)