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SB0022: Department of Disabilities - Housing Programs and Affiliated Foundations – Establishment

Position: Favorable

Hearing date: March 25, 2026

Committee: House Appropriations

On behalf of SEEC, a community provider of services to adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), we encourage a favorable report on SB0022. We also support the amendments brought forth from the Maryland Department of Disabilities.

By adding affordable and accessible **housing** programs as an official responsibility of the Department of Disabilities as well as supporting access to **technology** and **employment**, as well as other programs by establishing affiliated foundations, this bill will increase the independence and community participation by people with disabilities. From our experience of supporting over 300 adults with I/DD we know firsthand the importance of these programs so people can direct their lives with dignity, choice, authority, and responsibility within their own communities.

One of the main tenets of the 1999 Olmstead Supreme Court case is that people with disabilities have the right to live in the most integrated, community-based setting as possible and not forced to live in institutions. The right of people with disabilities to choose where they live can only be achieved with a reliable, affordable, and accessible **housing supply**. Adding affordable and accessible housing programs as an official responsibility of the Department of Disabilities will help ensure that people with I/DD have more choice and freedom when it comes to where they live.

As Sizhe, someone we support stated, I have the housing supports through Jubilee, a community provider. I moved out of my parents house September of last year. I have two roommates and I live at Main Street, affordable housing for people with disabilities (25%) and neurotypical people (75%).

At SEEC, **assistive technology** is another critical vehicle to reject ableism and reinforce choice, autonomy, and dignity for the people we support. The Department of Disabilities has been a valued partner in this initiative. This is not about fitting people to technology, it is about creating an inviting process led by the people we support and finding the right mix of high- and low-tech so they can build their own resources to communicate, be independent and included.

Robert, supported by SEEC, shared that technology is critical for his success at work. He does not communicate in a typical manner so his team communicates virtually using TEAMS and Robert also uses his iPad or the notes function on his phone when he converses with coworkers. Instead of using the call function on his phone to communicate with applicants, Robert emails them. Anything that he would normally handwrite such as an invoice number or signature on a purchase order, he makes labels for instead.

His Director stated that Robert is such a friendly and social person, and that he just suits the human resources department so well and he is an active and valuable member on the team. When asked about what he likes most about his job Robert responded that he likes making money, learning new skills all the time, and giving a hand with office tasks. He also started a retirement account.

At SEEC, we believe **meaningful employment** is a cornerstone for people belonging in their community. With the support of the Department of Disabilities, people with disabilities can discover their passions and prepare for meaningful roles in the workplace. The results speak for themselves: businesses partnering with SEEC report increased workplace productivity and morale, while job seekers gain independence, confidence, and a sense of belonging. It is not only about not just matching people with their ideal jobs, but also transforming lives and shaping more opportunities for everyone.

We believe in the power of alliance and the Maryland Department of Disabilities is one of our most valuable partners. This bill will increase opportunities and independence for people we support and we urge its passage. Thank you.

Warmly,
Karen Lee, CEO
Katrina Emmerson Kugel, Government Relations Manager