

Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 22 / HB 226

Department of Disabilities – Affiliated Foundation – Establishment

To: Honorable Members of the Senate Finance / House Health and Government Operations Committees
From: Maryland Statewide Independent Living Council Date: January 26, 2026

The Opportunity: Innovation Without Taxpayer Burden

SB 22 / HB 226 offers a fiscally responsible solution to expand essential services for Marylanders with disabilities. By authorizing the Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDOD) to establish an independent, non-profit foundation, this bill bridges the gap between private-sector capital and public-sector needs.

The Problem: The "Funding Ceiling"

Currently, Maryland's disability programs rely heavily on fluctuating federal grants and limited state general funds.

- **The Barrier:** Philanthropists and corporate partners are eager to invest but require the transparency and tax-deductible structure of a formal foundation.
- **The Consequence:** Without this bill, Maryland continues to leave significant private investment on the table.

Four Pillars of Impact

The foundation will create a sustainable, permanent funding stream for four critical areas of independence:

1. **Assistive Technology (MDTAP):** Protecting equipment lending libraries from rising costs to ensure students and workers have the tools to succeed.
2. **Low-Interest Loans (ATLP):** Increasing capacity for adapted vehicles and home modifications beyond current state funding limits.
3. **Employment (ODEAP):** Strengthening the "State as a Model Employer" (SAME) initiative through private-sector workforce partnerships.
4. **Accessible Housing:** Revitalizing the Affordable Apartments Program to create more integrated housing options via private collaboration.

A Proven, Cost-Neutral Model

This legislation is not an experiment; it follows a successful Maryland blueprint used by the Department of Natural Resources and the Maryland Stadium Authority.

- **Zero Fiscal Impact:** The foundation is self-supporting, utilizing private donations and grants.
- **Efficiency:** It allows the State to do more for its citizens with less administrative overhead.

Conclusion

SB 22 / HB 226 moves Maryland from a reactive posture to a proactive one. It builds a permanent infrastructure of support that is resilient to federal budget cuts and anchored by community investment.

The Maryland Statewide Independent Living Council urges a FAVORABLE report on SB 22 / HB 226.

Respectfully submitted, Lorna-Mae Silcott *Executive Director*