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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

*HB 1462-Department of Social and Economic Mobility –  
Individuals with Disabilities*

On July 26, 199- the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law. The purpose of the ADA was to prohibit discrimination against individuals living with disabilities in all areas of public life, including employment, transportation, public accommodations, and government services.

In Maryland, an estimated **1.1 million adults** (24% of the adult population) report having some form of disability. Of these, a smaller subset actively seeks or receives specialized state and federal services, categorized by the type of support they require. Following passage of the ADA, individuals have been more willing to identify as living with some form of disability. Advocates for this population have applauded progress made as a result of the ADA, but they point to much-needed improvement in the delivery of needed-services.

Maryland is considered a national leader in disability rights and ADA compliance. Yet there is still progress to be made in the state's efforts to weave a strong safety net for individuals and families who are seeking full access to resources that build independence, self-reliance and the full realization of individual skills and abilities.

HB 1462 seeks to encourage the social and economic mobility of individuals living with disabilities through the newly created Department of Social and Economic Mobility—a renaming of the Office of Small, Minority and Women Business Affairs to include Disability among the affairs managed by the department. Further, the Special Secretary for Small, Minority and Women Business Affairs will include Disability Services in those affairs, expanding the duties the Special Secretary to include matters concerning

individuals living with disabilities and generally altering the Department of Social and Economic Mobility Special Funds.

Among other things, the Blind Industries and Services of Maryland will be transferred to the new Department. The Office of Minority Business Enterprise. The Office of Small, Minority, Disability and Women Business Affairs will also reside within the Department as will the Office of Social Equity.

The purpose of this Department, among other things, is:

- To provide support for units of state government, individuals, and businesses that are tasked with maintaining social equity policies in the State.
- Monitor trends in social equity programs and policies across the nation.
- Propose new and innovative approaches to social equity programs.
- Ensure the fulfillment of the roles and responsibilities of the entities and social equity programs in the state for which it is the successor;
- track the performance of social equity programs and small or disadvantaged business assistance programs;
- promote and encourage full participation in the regulated cannabis industry by individuals from communities that have previously been disproportionately impacted by the war on drugs in order to positively impact those communities;
- Coordinate a variety of activities aimed at strengthening social equity in government and in service programs, including training and employment opportunities for individuals living with disabilities.

On or before the 15<sup>th</sup> day of each regular session of the General Assembly, the Special Secretary shall send an annual report on the Office of Small, Minority, Disability, and Women Business Affairs to the Governor.

*For these reasons we request a favorable finding.*