

**MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF DISABILITIES  
AGENCY RESPONSE TO  
DLS RECOMMENDATIONS  
FISCAL YEAR 2016 OPERATING BUDGET HEARINGS**

**HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE  
SUB-COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN RESOURCES**

**February 23, 2015**

**SENATE BUDGET & TAXATION COMMITTEE  
SUB-COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

**February 25, 2016**

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee today as you review the proposed budget for the Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDOD) for FY 2016. We would like to thank our assigned DLS analyst, Mr. Richard Harris, for his thorough analysis and are pleased that he has concluded that we have proposed a responsible spending plan for the coming year.

In addition to our testimony, MDOD has also provided copies of information shared with families recruited into the PROMISE Project. Also within that packet is a document that summarizes key policy and programs that are the focus of the Department's work on behalf of people with disabilities. It is our hope that this will be helpful to you and your staff, should you receive constituent calls related to PROMISE or other disability issues.

**Recommended Actions**

**1. Concur with the Governor's Allowance.**

We respectfully support this recommended action.

## **Discussion**

### **1. The Secretary should update the committees on the current status of the PROMISE Grant and what is expected for fiscal 2016.**

## **Response**

The US Department of Education has partnered with a number of other federal agencies to award five year PROMISE grants to Maryland and five other states in September of 2013. MDOD was designated by the Governor as the lead agency for this initiative. PROMISE is a nationwide research study about youth receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program who are approaching the transition from school into adulthood. The PROMISE initiative is intended to improve educational attainment, employment, and other outcomes for youth receiving SSI and their families. Maryland is recruiting 2000 youth between the ages of 14 and 16 who are receiving SSI. Youth and their families will be randomly assigned to an intervention (1000) or a control group (1000). Students and families in the intervention group will receive enhanced supports and services designed to increase positive educational and employment outcomes. Recruitment, enrolment and service intervention began in March 2014. As of February 23, 2015, 744 youth and their families have been enrolled statewide. Recruitment will continue through April 2016, to reach the 2000 total required. Interventions and summer employment will be provided through September 2018. The youth summer employment component will launch at the close of FY 2015 and continue into FY 2016 and beyond allowing participants who have completed the other interventions to receive a paid employment experience.

Staff from the PROMISE Program and its State partners have trained case managers on the program and work together to support youth and families engaged in the project.

State agency partners include:

- Maryland State Department of Education (Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services and Division of Rehabilitation Services);
- Department of Human Resources, (TANF agency);
- Department of Licensing and Labor Relations (WIA agency);
- Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DDA, MHA, and Medicaid); and
- Department of Juvenile Services

Key external partners include Transcen, Inc., an internationally renowned research and training entity specializing in transition age youth with disabilities, based in Rockville, Maryland. Transcen, Inc. will oversee the recruitment, enrolment, technical assistance, and formative evaluation of the project.

Way Station, Inc., a nationally recognized non-profit based in Frederick Maryland is currently providing intensive case management, supports and services to youth and their families,

including: Development of individualized plans focusing on educational and employment goals for the youth and interested family members. Delivery of services in the community and connection to other services (System Linkages) also support improved outcomes. Motivational interviewing techniques guide services and supports to achieve milestones/goals on Youth and Family Plans.

Career planning and work experiences are also a key intervention for service group participants and other family members, as appropriate. Youth and their families will complete: 1) a Positive Personal Profile, 2) an Individual Job Development Plan, and 3) a Workplace Supports Plan. One work experience (i.e. Job shadowing, informational interviews, etc.), for the youth will occur within first year of enrolling in Maryland PROMISE. By the conclusion of the program, all youth in the intervention group will have a minimum of one paid employment experience.

Other Services include a Benefits assessment completed through individual and family meetings with state certified benefits counselor and ongoing benefits assessment where needed. Financial literacy classes and coaching are also offered to service group participant and family members. MDOD recognized the importance of financial literacy for youth with disability and their families and included it as an intervention in MD PROMISE, creating a partnership with the MD Cash Campaign to develop and provide those trainings.

## **2. The Secretary should comment on increasing employment for individuals with disabilities in Maryland.**

### **Response**

MDOD and its State agency partners remain committed to improving employment outcomes for people with disabilities. MDOD and the Division of Rehabilitation Services developed a state level benefits counseling certificate program to provide accurate information on the impact of work earnings on federal benefits for job seekers with disabilities. On average, those who receive benefits counseling services are 30 percent more likely to become employed and to earn over \$200 more per month than individuals who do not receive benefits counseling.

Additionally in the winter of 2014, MDOD developed and produced promotional You Tube videos entitled “**Why Not Work**” targeting parents of young adults with disabilities. These stories feature successful individuals with disabilities and their parents to address fears and concerns regarding employment.

The following highlights other key activities that will increase employment outcomes.

### **People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities**

In November of 2014, MDOD was designated the Lead State Agency for a technical assistance opportunity through the US Department of Labor Office on Disability Employment Policy (ODEP). The Employment First Core State Leadership Mentoring Program will provide

training and assess six (6) community providers to build capacity and transform community providers on customized employment. MDOD and the State and external partners will also develop recommendations for core competencies related to customized employment within the State and identify ways to infuse Employment First initiatives into the nonresidential portion of the State's Home and Community Based Services Waivers delivered through Medicaid.

MDOD is also currently involved in two state level provider driven groups looking at subminimum wage. One group convened by Maryland Works is looking at Sheltered Workshops and other subminimum wage environments. MDOD also participates in a Fair Wages Workgroup created by the board of Arc Maryland.

### Workforce Investment and Opportunities Act (WIOA)

As a member of the Governor's Workforce Investment Board, the Secretary for MDOD and other staff will partner with the Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation (DLLR) to address the enhanced focus on people with disabilities required under the Act. WIOA places an increased emphasis on workers and job seekers with disabilities and their success in the labor market. MDOD expects to support work matching employers with skilled workers who may benefit from additional education, skills training, and employment support services.

MDOD and its State agency partners will engage in development of strategies to support the use of career pathways that provide individuals with disabilities with workforce investment activities, education, and supportive services to enter or retain employment. Activities include the identification and dissemination of information on best practices for the effective operation of One-Stop Centers and the development of strategies for technological improvements to facilitate access, including improvements to technology is accessible to individuals with disabilities. MDOD also anticipates incorporating strategies from Maryland's Unified Plan into the 2016-2019 State Disabilities Plan.

### Higher Education

In addition to our commitment to physical and programmatic access to State Universities and Colleges through the Access Maryland Capital Budget referenced in the analysis, MDOD continues to engage with MHEC to a more efficient means and method of tracking graduation/completion rates for students with disabilities, known to Disability Support Service offices. These efforts will likely also result in outcome data such as the percentage of program participants who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential and/or who are achieving measurable skill gains toward such a credential or employment.