

**Maryland SB 398 Hearing Testimony**  
**By: Amir Soltanianzadeh**  
**Delivered on: March 3, 2020**

I would first like to thank the Madam Chair and members of this committee for your service and the opportunity to speak before you today. My name is Amir Soltanianzadeh and I am the CEO & Co-Founder of Spine Align, a medical device startup based in Baltimore, Maryland, that develops surgical feedback tools for spine surgeons.

Maryland has been a great ally and resource to our venture and the medical device startup community over the past few years. When we reflect on how the region is comparing to our colleagues in other major startup hubs, like California, New York, and Massachusetts, Maryland has a strong competitive advantage with a supply of many talented engineers, world-class hospital systems, and unparalleled proximity to important government agencies. However, one resource that can certainly use additional support to encourage more growth for new technology startups and STEM jobs is early-stage, non-dilutive funding. This class of funding is becoming more and more rare to find these days, and most investors are too risk averse to provide investments in medical device startups until they are closer to commercialization, which can often take 3-5 years from the company's inception. Thus, until a technology startup receives a large government grant like a NSF SBIR award, you are often moving at a slow pace to conserve the capital that you have scraped together. And even then, there are many restrictions on what this grant funding can be used for, such as patent expenses and certain legal fees, which for a medical device startup is a considerable burden that further limits remaining funds from addressing technology development and new hires. For example, until this current seed investment round that we are raising, we have not had sufficient resources to hire more than one full-time biomedical engineer.

Thus, today I would like to emphasize my strongest support for this proposed initiative for TEDCO to provide matching funds for SBIR awardees. I truly believe that additional early-stage funding will be the primary catalyst to a growing leadership of technology startups from the Maryland area.

Thank you again for your time and consideration.