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WRITTEN TESTIMONY

House Bill 612 (HB612) – Recovery for the Economy, Livelihoods, Industries, Entrepreneurs, and Families (RELIEF) Act

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Shomrei Emunah Congregation

Simon E. Sobeloff Jewish Law Society

Suburban Orthodox Congregation

Temple Beth Shalom

Temple Isaiah

Zionist Organization of America

Baltimore District

House Ways and Means Committee February 4, 2021

SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

Background: HB612 aims to implement a series of financial changes for Fiscal Years 2021 and 2022 to relieve some of the adverse economic impacts of the coronavirus pandemic. The proposal would include payments to low-income families; relief from income taxes on unemployment benefit payments; relief for businesses on some projected unemployment insurance tax increases; support for small businesses by allowing them to retain some collected sales tax revenues; and conversion of some state business loans into grants. The full proposal is expected to decrease state general fund revenues decrease by \$767.6 million in FY 2021 and \$92.5 million in FY 2022.

Written Comments: The Baltimore Jewish Council (BJC) represents The Associated: Jewish Federation of Baltimore and all of its agencies and programs. The experiences of our agencies since the start of the pandemic illustrate the need for significant assistance to vulnerable individuals, families, small businesses, and non-profit organizations.

A snapshot of what our agencies have seen, and the work they have done during the pandemic, includes:

- The number of low-income individuals and families seeking emergency financial assistance and the amount needed to help them meet basic needs continues to increase. In December, there was 24% increase in number of clients receiving assistance and a 31% increase in total disbursement compared to the number of clients and total disbursement in December 2019.
- The community helpline established at the start of this crisis and managed by Jewish Community Services has responded to more than 5,900 calls.
- The Associated's domestic violence agency, CHANA, has experienced an influx of cases that are of the highest level of danger. COVID has made it more challenging to navigate client safety needs as clients are scared to leave their homes, options for staying with friends or family

BALTIMORE JEWISH COUNCIL

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are reduced, and some abusers have been let out of jail pre-trial to reduce COVID risks.

- Food insecurity in our community and throughout Baltimore has been a growing challenge. The Associated system has provided more than 85,000 meals and boxes of food since March. More than 40,000 meals have been donated to people in need through Jewish Volunteer Connection's initiatives in partnership with area schools, congregations, and community organizations. CHAI has provided 15,185 boxes of food and fresh produce to people in need through weekly food distributions at Fallstaff Elementary/Middle School and its Mobile Food Pantry.

Given such needs, the Baltimore Jewish Council strongly endorses passage of a significant relief package by the General Assembly.

In addition to the original RELIEF Act proposal, numerous amendments have been proposed by legislative leaders and others. These amendments range from expanded assistance to people with disabilities; to additional dollars for food banks, job training, and energy assistance, to grants for impacted non-profits, hospitality businesses, restaurants, and other small businesses. Given the complex and widespread economic impacts of the pandemic on vulnerable communities, the Baltimore Jewish Council encourages legislators to strongly consider adding a number of these amendments to expand the RELIEF Act.

The Baltimore Jewish Council believes that is imperative for the General Assembly to provide substantial economic relief beyond what is being offered by the federal government. We support HB612, with amendments, to further assist vulnerable Marylanders and struggling Maryland non-profits and small businesses.

The Baltimore Jewish Council, a coalition of central Maryland Jewish organizations and congregations, advocates at all levels of government, on a variety of social welfare, economic and religious concerns, to protect and promote the interests of the Associated Jewish Federation of Baltimore, its agencies and the Greater Baltimore Jewish community.