



LEGISLATIVE POSITION:

Favorable

House Bill 327 - Maryland Employment Advancement Right Now Program – Strategic Industry Partnerships - Definition

House Economic Matters Committee

Tuesday, February 14, 2023

Dear Chairman Wilson and Members of the Committee:

Founded in 1968, the Maryland Chamber of Commerce is the leading voice for business in Maryland. We are a statewide coalition of more than 6,400 members and federated partners working to develop and promote strong public policy that ensures sustained economic health and growth for Maryland businesses, employees, and families.

As introduced, HB 327 expands eligibility for Maryland Department of Labor’s Employment Advancement Right Now (EARN) Program by changing the definition of “strategic industry partnership” to also include collaborations between a single employer and other partners in which the employer offers workforce development and training.

Maryland’s EARN Program, established in 2013, has worked to advance the skills of Maryland’s workforce and foster economic development by providing grants for industry partnerships, workforce training programs and other job-readiness and skills training programs. These partnerships have allowed regional industries and their stakeholders to collaborate on solutions that generate greater economic outcomes through the identification and implementation of strategies to address workforce needs and shortages. According to Maryland Department of Labor’s 2022 report on the program, EARN has helped over 8,000 unemployed and underemployed individuals attain employment as a result of their participation and more than 11,000 workers have benefited from EARN training programs.

House Bill 327 would build on and expand the success of this program by allowing small businesses who were previously ineligible to apply for a strategic industry partnership to now apply for EARN funding. With many small businesses still struggling from the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and current labor shortages, we believe it is imperative that small businesses are included in such funding opportunities.

For these reasons, the Maryland Chamber of Commerce respectfully requests a **Favorable Report** on **HB 327**.