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BILL NO.: **SB 482**

TITLE: Governor's Office for Children – Engaging Neighborhoods,
Organizations, Unions, Governments, and Households
(ENOUGH) Grant Program (ENOUGH Act of 2024)

COMMITTEE: Education, Energy, and the Environment

POSITION: **SUPPORT**

DATE: March 1, 2024

Baltimore County **SUPPORTS** Senate Bill 482 – Governor's Office for Children – Engaging Neighborhoods, Organizations, Unions, Governments, and Households (ENOUGH) Grant Program (ENOUGH Act of 2024). This legislation would create the Governor's Office for Children and establish the ENOUGH Grant Program to increase community health and safety with an emphasis on access to quality education, jobs, housing and health care and support for youth and children.

Baltimore County supports this legislation because we already using this model across the county. We have launched a nearly identical place-based pilot in the community of Essex, as well as two other communities, using American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding. A state grant program like ENOUGH would potentially allow Baltimore County to sustain our early success and encourage similar initiatives in vulnerable communities across the state.

In 2021, County Executive Olszewski made the strategic decision to target \$3 million of the county's ARPA dollars to revitalize Essex - a once thriving middle class area in eastern Baltimore County - through multiple layers of improvements and interventions.

Essex was chosen as the pilot site for a number of reasons. Through the County's BCSTAT data-driven management initiative, the Essex community was consistently flagged across multiple health and safety data points and indices of social vulnerability. Analyses and heat mapping showed low family income, food deserts, high levels of public assistance, increasing use of housing vouchers, high rates of opioid overdoses and other indicators of health and income disparities.

In 2021 Essex Reimagined was born – a multi-department, place-based, community-oriented revitalization and recovery initiative in the Essex community.

With a broad mission of improving quality of life, Essex Reimagined focuses on enhanced safety, improved health and expanded opportunity and equity. The initiative seeks transformative change through coordinated planning, partnership and the dedicated resources needed to empower residents and address social and economic disparities. We have been able to augment the initial ARPA investment by braiding together several million dollars in other funding.

The programs within the Essex Reimagined initiative are diverse, ranging from distributing trash carts with attached lids to households in neighborhoods with chronic trash and rodent related complaints to incubating a local community development corporation.

The interventions and partnerships include:

- Partnering with and supporting the [Chesapeake Gateway Chamber of Commerce](#) efforts to establish the Essex Community Development Corporation and revitalize the much-needed business community on the Eastern Avenue corridor;
- Engaging in partnership with [Roca Baltimore](#), a youth violence intervention program now in Essex, to aid in the reduction of juvenile crime;
- Providing [high-quality trash carts](#) for a cleaner community;
- Increasing [food program support](#) in the community at the Eastpoint and Franklin Square Hospital's FoodRx program;
- Partnering with the Community Assistance Network to augment their food pantry and case management services;
- Providing [streetscaping and roadway improvements](#) on the Eastern Boulevard business corridor as well as support for planning and design for a multi-year bridge and sidewalk project;
- Increasing safety on Eastern Avenue by support of the Lighting and Camera Business Installation Project;
- With the [Ripken Foundation](#), supporting the first Baltimore County project to install a turf field at Renaissance Park;
- Funding the Hiring of a Domestic Violence Specialist at the Department of Health and Human Services and a social worker at the Essex Library; and
- Partnering with the Essex [Chesapeake Feeder Pattern Community Schools](#) on the 2023 Community Connections Fair to bring health and community resources into the community. The second annual fair is scheduled for 202

Essex Reimagined is partnering with local anchors like the Community College of Baltimore County and Medstar Health and engaging multiple county departments from Baltimore County Public Libraries and Baltimore County Public Schools to Health and Human Services, Recreation and Parks and Housing and Community Development.

All of this work is anchored in community engagement including:

- Ongoing community input surveys, including in Spanish, to gauge public priorities and perception;

- community empowerment efforts to assist residents in organizing neighborhood advocacy groups; and
- tabling at public events and establishing a regular presence at community meetings.

As required under ARPA, we have developed metrics to measure success. For example, we collect data from proactive code enforcement sweeps, rat bait traps and twice weekly trash pick up. Preliminary data shows that trash volume is up and code enforcement citations are down as are 311 calls for code violations.

While Essex Reimagined was our flagship initiative, we have already expanded this place-based strategy to two other struggling communities: Historic Dundalk Town Center in the Southeast and Woodlawn Village on the westside using additional ARPA dollars.

In Dundalk Village, the initial project is reimagining Veterans Park, an urban park in the middle of the historic shopping center. We chose this park as the centerpiece in response to chronic community complaints about the condition of the park and lack of positive community-oriented activity. We are leading a community-driven process to uplift the park and the surrounding shopping center and adjacent neighborhoods. Like Essex we started with basic community concerns – like blight and trash – with the intention of investing in other neighborhood initiatives. We are also coordinating with community institutions – the Dundalk YMCA, Dundalk Elementary and several adjacent community associations - to organize clean ups, programming and community events in and around the park.

In Woodlawn we have focused on Woodlawn Village, near historic Gwynn Oak park, with a commercial core in need of investment. We are working with the local business association and several community associations to revitalize the area. The main project to date, in response to community concerns, is to support local small businesses and create more economic opportunity for surrounding community members. The Woodlawn Village place-based initiative is one of several related projects taking place on westside of the county – including the start up of the West Baltimore County Redevelopment Authority, the reimagining of Security Square Mall and the launch of the Liberty Road Community Development Organization. All of these projects are deeply connected to community organizations and reflect local interests and include ongoing engagement. They are well-positioned to be part of a regional or neighborhood partnership that would potentially benefit from this program.

The ENOUGH Grant Program embraces what we are doing in the county in multiple ways:

- promoting place-based partnership;
- fostering ground-up coordination;
- building local organizational capacity and
- targeting funding to address specific communities’ specific needs, across multiple dimensions – human services, job training, physical infrastructure, property upkeep, health and safety.

Baltimore County is seeing early success in revitalizing struggling communities and setting up residents for success through this model.

Accordingly, Baltimore County urges a **FAVORABLE** report on SB 482 from the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee. For more information, please contact Jenn Aiosa, Director of Government Affairs at jaiosa@baltimorecountymd.gov.