



The Senate of Maryland
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401-1991

SB 1188 - Maryland Protecting Opportunities and Regional Trade (PORT) Act

Testimony of Senate President Bill Ferguson

On April 2, 2024

Before the Senate Finance and Budget and Taxation Committees

Why This Bill Matters:

On March 26, 2024, the Francis Scott Key bridge collapsed into the Patapsco River after the Dali, a 984-foot container ship, collided with one of the bridge's primary support pillars. Tragically, six construction workers lost their lives after what was otherwise a routine day at work. The impact of the catastrophic collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge continues to affect not just the families of the six workers, but is rippling across Baltimore City, the State, and global supply chains.

The Port accounts for approximately \$3.3 billion in annual personal income for individuals, with approximately 15,300 jobs in Maryland directly generated by Port activity and approximately 140,000 total jobs linked to Port activity. It is critical that we ensure the thousands of workers and their families who rely on the Port of Baltimore can put food on their tables and pay their bills. We also must assist our businesses so that they return to the Port of Baltimore once the channel fully reopens.

What This Bill Does:

Senate Bill 1188 will help workers and businesses impacted by the partial closure of the Port of Baltimore by enabling the Administration to use the State's Rainy Day Fund to scale up targeted grant programs. Specifically, the PORT Act will allow the Maryland Departments of Commerce and Labor to:

- Support workers not covered by our unemployment insurance system;
- Ensure impacted businesses can retain and fully pay their workforce; and
- Incentivize companies to return to the Port after it reopens fully.

With the amendments, the bill also establishes the Fallen Transportation Workers Scholarship Fund to assist the surviving spouses and dependents of those transportation workers who lose their lives while on the job. In addition, the amendments make it clear that any money donated to the surviving families is tax exempt. Finally the amendments:

- Suspend the requirement that workers impacted by the reduced operations at the Port and receiving unemployment benefits seek employment;
- Increase the bonding authority of the Maryland Transportation Authority so that the State can move swiftly at the right time to rebuild the Key Bridge; and
- Make other clarifying and technical changes to ensure the Administration has the flexibility to administer the program and maximize the receipt of federal funding.

Why You Should Vote For This Bill:

Six people lost their lives when the Francis Scott Key Bridge collapsed on March 26. This bill cannot make those families whole, but it acknowledges the tremendous sacrifice of the workers. In addition, the State of Maryland and tens of thousands of people rely on the port for its economic activity. This activity makes Maryland a leader in automotive and agricultural commerce and a crucial logistics point for supply chains across the country and the world. By making tactical investments in our highly skilled and dedicated workforce and businesses, we will ensure that we retain our economic engine that keeps Maryland workers and business moving forward as we rebuild.

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 1188 and I urge the committee to move this bill with a favorable report.