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Joint Audit and Evaluation Committee
Joint Committee on Federal Relations

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

MEGA Council Extension (SB459)

House Health & Government Operations Committee; March 19, 2024: 1:00 PM

In 2020, [SB630](#) created the Maryland Efficient Grant Application (MEGA) Council to streamline nonprofit grant applications across State agencies. The Council is composed of stakeholders whose goal was to develop a “Common App” for prospective grantees. This legislation is set to expire on June 30, 2025.

The original bill attracted strong, bipartisan support— all 47 Senators joined as co-sponsors; it passed both the House of Delegates and the Senate unanimously, with recognition that nonprofits provide vital services to communities throughout the State. The Moore/Miller Administration champions the MEGA Council’s mission and aims to extend the vital work it is doing.

Despite delays caused by both the COVID-19 Pandemic and subsequent government staffing shortages, the MEGA Council has diagnosed the challenges with invoicing, recommended “Prompt Payment Parity” for nonprofits (now law!), and created common budget categories and terms. With an extended sunset expiration date, the Council will be able to recommend and implement solutions to help nonprofit grantees.

[SB459](#) would modify the Council to better help Maryland’s nonprofits by:

- Extending the expiration date to July 1, 2028;
- Adding the Comptroller (or their designee) to the Council;
- Studying the creation of a State Grants Ombudsman, with a report due July 1, 2025;
- Mandating the submission of annual progress reports to the General Assembly through the Council’s expiration; and
- Requiring an additional report of the Council’s recommendations by July 1, 2027.

Comptroller Lierman supports the addition of a representative from her Office to the Council.

A State Grants Ombudsperson would be a “one-stop shop” on troubleshooting, sharing information on grant opportunities, and enhancing the operations of nonprofits.

Let’s pass the bill to create improvements and provide for more efficient management of nonprofit grants.

This bill passed the Senate unanimously. The cross-filed bill ([HB418](#)) passed this Committee and the whole House unanimously, as well.

I urge a favorable report on SB459.

SENATE



BILL NO: Senate Bill 459
TITLE: Grant Applications and Reporting - Maryland Efficient Grant Application Council - Alterations
COMMITTEE: Budget and Taxation
HEARING DATE: February 7, 2024
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

The Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV) is the state domestic violence coalition that brings together victim service providers, allied professionals, and concerned individuals for the common purpose of reducing intimate partner and family violence and its harmful effects on our citizens. **MNADV urges the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee to issue a favorable report on SB 459.**

Senate Bill 459 would extend the term and modify the composition of the Maryland Efficient Grant Application (or "MEGA") Council. This legislation will extend the life of the effort to reform state grants processes through the Maryland Efficient Grant Application Council until at least 2028, and to its membership. The Council was created by legislation in 2020 to address inefficiency and inconsistency in state grants administration, by legislation (HB 1539 and SB 620) that passed both houses without a dissenting vote in committee or on the floor.

Our member programs face many challenges with the grant processes in Maryland including the change to quarterly payments for most grants, which is a change from monthly payments. It is very burdensome for nonprofits who must front 3 months of funds and then wait 1-2 more months for reimbursement. They face inconsistent requirements for grant adjustments depending on grant monitors. They are also burdened with repeatedly filing the same paperwork that should already be on file – i.e. 501 c3 status.

Today as in 2020, basic budgetary and organizational information required for grant applications and financial reporting, as well as invoicing and monitoring policies, vary among, state agencies. The lack of standardization inhibits efficiencies that could be obtained at the State level by streamlining common steps and processes, and the development of effective state-level tracking or accountability. The Council was established at the onset of the pandemic to develop and recommend a new standardized structure for state grants documents and processing, and where reasonable to be consistent with federal grants standards. Its work was seriously obstructed by COVID and the resulting lack of staff support during the last administration.

For further information contact Melanie Shapiro • Public Policy Director • 301-852-3930 • mshapiro@mnadv.org

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Senate Bill 459

*Grant Applications and Reporting – Maryland Efficient Grant Application Council –
Alterations*

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Budget and Taxation Committee

Date: February 7, 2024

From: Kevin Kinnally

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** SB 459. This bill contemplates a State Grants Ombudsperson to collect and disseminate federal, state, and local grant opportunities, which would benefit county governments and, in turn, shared constituents.

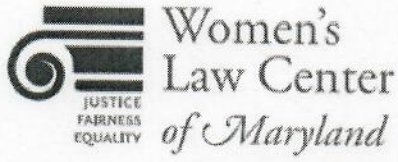
Many federal grant funds ultimately go to state and local governments, which may award funds as sub-awards to local entities, such as nonprofit organizations. The grants support health care, public education, housing, community development, childcare, job training, transportation, and clean water, among other programs. However, many local governments – particularly in rural areas of the state – lack the resources and expertise to navigate the complexities of the federal grantmaking process.

The Maryland Efficient Grant Application Council is charged with improving efficiency, eliminating redundant processes, reducing paperwork and administrative burdens on both granting agencies and grant recipients, and facilitating the development and implementation of a statewide centralized grants management and accountability system.

SB 459 requires the Council to study the feasibility of a State Grants Ombudsperson to provide technical assistance with (1) accessing and navigating state grant programs, (2) resolving delays in the grant-making process, and (3) collecting and disseminating information on opportunities for grants from federal, state, and local governments.

Counties believe this bill will streamline the grantmaking process, level the playing field for all local governments, and provide crucial information for county leaders to pass on to their constituents and local businesses.

Accordingly, MACo urges a **FAVORABLE** report for SB 459.



SENATE

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BILL NO: Senate Bill 459
TITLE: Grant Applications and Reporting - Maryland Efficient Grant Application Council - Alterations
COMMITTEE: Budget & Taxation
HEARING DATE: February 7, 2024
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

The Women's Law Center of Maryland is a 501c3 nonprofit organization that relies on state grants to provide critical services to victims of domestic violence. We strongly support **SB459 - Grant Applications and Reporting - Maryland Efficient Grant Application Council - Alterations** and urge the Budget and Taxation Committee to issue a favorable report.

SB459 would extend the life of the Maryland Efficient Grant Application Council and create a State Ombudsperson office to provide nonprofits technical assistance with accessing and navigating state programs, resolve delays in the grant-making process, and collect and disseminate information on opportunities for federal, state, and local grants. As an agency that has received state grants for over 25 years, we believe that continuing the Efficient Grant Application Council would be beneficial for nonprofit organizations.

Preparing grant applications, and their subsequent monitoring and reporting, poses challenges for nonprofit organizations. First, the process is time-consuming, requiring extensive research, data collection, and detailed proposal development. Nonprofit staff often find themselves stretched thin, dividing their attention between grant preparation and management and the day-to-day operational demands of their organizations. Additionally, the multitude of grant opportunities comes with diverse application requirements and guidelines, leading to a complex and often confusing landscape. Nonprofits may struggle to tailor their proposals to meet these varied criteria, contributing to the overall burden. The competitive nature of grant applications further exacerbates the challenge, as organizations vie for limited funding. Moreover, the cycle of continual fundraising to sustain operations compounds the burden, diverting resources away from the core mission of the organization.

The Efficient Grant Application Council could serve as a catalyst for increased efficiency, fairness, and collaboration in the grant application process. This council could streamline procedures, creating a unified and standardized application format that reduces the time and resources nonprofits currently spend on navigating disparate application requirements. By promoting consistency, the council would ensure a fairer evaluation of proposals, fostering a level playing field for organizations of all sizes and focus areas. Additionally, the council could provide valuable resources, training, and support to help nonprofits improve their grant applications, enhancing the overall quality of submissions. Ultimately, an Efficient Grant Application Council would empower nonprofits to navigate the grant landscape more effectively, encouraging innovation and amplifying their impact on the communities they serve.

For these reasons, the Women's Law Center of Maryland urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 459.

The Women's Law Center of Maryland is a non-profit legal services organization whose mission is to ensure the physical safety, economic security, and bodily autonomy of women in Maryland. Our mission is advanced through direct legal services, information and referral hotlines, and statewide advocacy.



February 5, 2024

**Testimony on Senate Bill 459
Grant Applications and Reporting – Maryland Efficient Grant Application Council – Alterations
Senate Budget and Tax Committee**

Position: Favorable

The Mental Health Association of Frederick County (MHA) is an organization providing prevention, intervention and treatment services in Western Maryland including a 24/7 crisis response call center, behavioral health walk-in services and supportive services for families such as home visiting, child care resource and referral and advocacy for children in foster care. We urge you to support Senate Bill 459.

This bill extends the life of the Council until 2028, adds a State Grants Ombudsperson, and includes the Comptroller and Legislative Auditor or their designees to the membership of the Council. These changes will allow the Council to complete its important work that was disrupted during COVID, provide much needed support to nonprofits seeking to provide services through State grants to Marylanders, garner the expertise needed to continue the work of the Council.

Creation of an Ombudsperson in the Governor's Office would expedite attention to and resolution of problems with the timely release and approval of grant announcements and agreements, payment terms and delays, and invoicing requirements. To illustrate how an Ombudsperson could assist with delays in the grant-making process, I offer you a recent example for a grant the MHA received **more than a year** after services were supposed to go live.

- RFP Issue Date - February 29, 2022
- Proposal Due Date - April 15, 2022
- Original Grant Period Start Date - July 1, 2022
- Actual Award Date - September 22, 2023
- Actual Grant Period Start Date - October 1, 2023

Nonprofits who are potential grantees are often reluctant to question Procurement Officers for fear of not receiving grant funding. An Ombudsperson would minimize this reluctance and provide Marylanders with the services they need.

Please give Senate Bill 459 a favorable report.

Building a strong foundation of emotional wellness

SENATE



Maryland Association of
Resources for Families & Youth

February 7, 2024

Senate Bill 459

**Grant Applications and Reporting-Maryland Efficient Grant Application Council-
Alterations**

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

Position: SUPPORT

The Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth (MARFY) is an association of private child caring organizations providing foster care, group homes, and other services through more than 200 programs across Maryland. The members of MARFY represent providers who serve Maryland's most vulnerable children who are in out of home placements due to abuse, neglect or severe mental health, and medical needs. We operate group homes, treatment foster care programs and independent living programs, primarily serving the foster care population as well as a juvenile services population.

If passed, Senate Bill 459 would address the work of the MEGA Council that was seriously obstructed by the pandemic. Senate Bill 459 would also address the lack of staff support during the last administration. While the authorizing legislation continues in effect until June 2025, Senate Bill 459 would extend the date to a more realistic goal for completion, June 2028. Senate Bill 459 also includes the Comptroller and Legislative Auditor, or their designees to the Council, and charge the Council to study and make recommendations on the creation of a "STATE GRANTS OMBUDSPERSON TO PROVIDE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE WITH: ACCESSING AND NAVIGATING STATE GRANT PROGRAMS; RESOLVING DELAYS IN THE GRANT-MAKING PROCESS; AND COLLECTING AND DISSEMINATING INFORMATION ON OPPORTUNITIES FOR GRANTS FROM FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT"

MARFY is a nonprofit organization that relies on grant funding, for budgeting and financial planning. Senate Bill 459 would support MARFY's efforts to make important changes in a more efficient and smooth application process. Timely funding helps maintain the enthusiasm and motivation for our members and providers. Experience has shown that both the Legislative Auditor and



February 7, 2024

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT

SB 459 – Grant Applications and Reporting - Maryland Efficient Grant Application Council - Alterations

Behavioral Health System Baltimore (BHSB) is a nonprofit organization that serves as the local behavioral health authority (LBHA) for Baltimore City. BHSB works to increase access to a full range of quality behavioral health (mental health and substance use) services and advocates for innovative approaches to prevention, early intervention, treatment, crisis response, and recovery for individuals, families, and communities. Baltimore City represents nearly 35 percent of the public behavioral health system in Maryland, serving over 100,000 people with mental illness and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as “behavioral health”) annually.

Behavioral Health System Baltimore supports SB 459 – Grant Applications and Reporting - Maryland Efficient Grant Application Council – Alterations as this would assist the Council to fulfill its mission and implement its recommendations for improving grant application and management processes across state government.

Across state government, basic budgetary and organizational information required for grant applications and financial reporting, as well as invoicing and monitoring policies, vary greatly among state agencies. This variability leads to duplication of effort, and to conflicting ‘business practices’ adopted on a program-by-program basis, and imposes unnecessary hardships on grantees. The lack of standardization also inhibits efficiencies that could be obtained at the State level by streamlining common steps and processes, and the development of effective state-level tracking or accountability.

As a non-profit LBHA, BHSB manages 38 different funding awards from the state totaling approximately \$53 million to support the behavioral health needs of the people in Baltimore City. Most of the funding BHSB receives is from the Behavioral Health Administration and even within this agency, grant application and management processes vary widely. Having uniform grant application forms, financial controls, and reporting requirements would allow BHSB to streamline its operations and redirect resources to focus on access to behavioral health services for people in Baltimore City.

BHSB is grateful to the General Assembly for establishing the Maryland Efficient Grant Application Council and their continued focus on supporting non-profit organizations. **As such, BHSB urges the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee to pass SB 459.**

For more information, please contact: Adrienne Breidenstine, Vice President, Policy & Communications, Adrienne.Breidenstine@bhsbaltimore.org or 443-908-0503

SENATE
SPARKFFS

IGNITING CHANGE & KINDLING RESILIENCE, ONE SPARK AT A TIME.

Testimony in Support of SB 459: Grant Applications and Reporting - Maryland Efficient Grant Application Council – Alterations

Franca Brilliant, Partner, SparkFFS

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
February 7, 2023

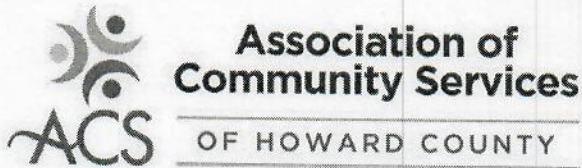
Chair Guy Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe and honorable members of the Budget and Taxation Committee, I am writing as a partner in SparkFFS, a consulting firm to nonprofits, and also as a long-time nonprofit professional, to support Senate Bill 459, Grant Applications and Reporting - Maryland Efficient Grant Application Council – Alterations.

The state has made efforts to improve grants processing, including the prompt payment legislation passed last year, but there is still much to be done to ensure that the partnership between nonprofits and the state runs smoothly and efficiently. Maryland benefits enormously from the thousands of nonprofits that provide a wide range of services to residents. State grant processes are overly cumbersome, payment is often delayed by months, and there is no one in the administration consistently responding to problems as they arise.

This bill has several provisions that will take important steps towards a more effective partnership between the state and nonprofits. It will extend the life of the Maryland Efficient Grant Application Council which has focused on developing recommendations for a standardized structure for state grants documents and processing, which is generally consistent with federal grants standards. The Council's work was interrupted by the pandemic and weakened by lack of staffing during the last administration, and it should be renewed. Furthermore, the bill would add the Comptroller and Legislative Auditor to the Council, adding their expertise and their influence to the recommendations the Council produces.

Equally important, the bill would charge the Council to make recommendations for the creation of a state grants ombudsperson to provide assistance with state grant programs, help resolve delays in the grant-making process, and collect and disseminate information on opportunities for grants from federal, state and local governments. Creation of this position would make a difference to nonprofits in their everyday dealings with the state while we collectively work to reform the grants process.

SENATE



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Senate Budget & Taxation Committee
February 8, 2024

Senate Bill 459 - Grant Applications and Reporting -
Maryland Efficient Grant Application Council - Alterations

Support

The Association of Community Services (ACS) of Howard County, a 501c3 nonprofit itself, is a membership organization serving nonprofit agencies in our community. Our members provide services ranging from mentoring to food assistance, housing, legal services, transportation, and more. Nonprofit budgets are tight, so delayed payment of State grants has serious consequences. When expenses need to be paid, nonprofits must have the funds they've been promised in their grant awards or risk being unable to pay their staff, rent, or other bills – ultimately impacting their ability to provide their services. Cumbersome processes also consume precious staff time in organizations that are often short-staffed. The State can do better.

ACS of Howard County supports Senate Bill 459. We believe more time is needed for the Maryland Efficient Grant Application Council to achieve its goals. Time was lost during the pandemic, and staffing has been insufficient. We also support the addition of the Comptroller's office and Legislative Auditor to the Council. Experience has shown that both the Comptroller and Legislative Auditor have functions that intersect with the efficiency of the grants process. Their inclusion on the Council would ensure that their role and expertise are considered in the work of the Council.

The bill also directs the Council to study and make recommendations on the creation of an Ombudsperson in the Governor's Office. We believe this would help to expedite attention to and resolution of what seem to be everyday problems with the timely release and approval of grant announcements and agreements, payment terms and delays, and invoicing requirements. This would be especially helpful during the period before substantial reform is accomplished.

The State relies on nonprofits to deliver a wide range of essential services. Improving the grant application and management process would have a significant, positive impact for nonprofits receiving state funding.

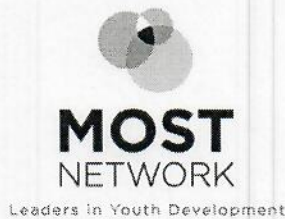
We urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 459.

Submitted by,

Lois K Mikkila

Lois K Mikkila
Interim Executive Director
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SENATE



**Senate Bill 459 - Grant Applications and Reporting –
Maryland Efficient Grant Application Council - Alterations
Budget & Taxation Committee – 2/7/24 – 1 p.m.
Position: Favorable**

The Maryland Out of School Time Network (MOST) is a statewide organization dedicated to closing opportunity gaps by expanding both the quantity and quality of afterschool and summer learning opportunities for school-aged young people. MOST is one of the fifty statewide networks supported by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and serves as Maryland's affiliate to the National Afterschool Association.

The Maryland State Department of Education manages grant programs for Afterschool and other youth program providers. Over the years, there have been many examples of challenges for the nonprofits applying for and receiving these grants. These include extreme delays in payments, inconsistent guidance and contract management, confusion over allowable expenses, and lack of transparency in the grant-making process. Sometimes, these have caused major disruptions in the operations of the programs and organizations receiving these grants. With broad-based input from the field, MOST has put forward a set of recommendations that can be reviewed at <https://bit.ly/OST-GRANTS>. These recommendations include examples from other states that could be replicated in Maryland. Because we have not seen significant progress in improving either the grant application or grants management processes, MOST enthusiastically supports SB 459.

We are particularly favorable to creating an Ombudsperson specifically for state grants. We have seen requests for clarifications, appeals, and amelioration extend over long periods of time, often with denials that provide no further information or support. We encourage the legislature to extend the Maryland Efficient Grant Application Council until 2028 and support the alterations to the council's composition and reporting requirements.

Many organizations that receive funding from the state are small to medium-sized nonprofits providing critical resources to children and families. Grants are the necessary fuel to the work. However, the state doesn't always treat its grantees as partners. There are grant-making best practices that, if adopted, will ultimately support more effectiveness on the ground in communities. MOST thanks Senator Kagan for sponsoring this bill, and we urge a favorable report.

Ellie Mitchell
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Maryland Out of School Time Network / Maryland Coalition for Community Schools

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SENATE



February 6, 2024

Position: SUPPORT

HB 459 - Grant Applications and Reporting - Maryland Efficient Grant Application Council - Alterations

Finance Committee:

I am writing on behalf of Maryland Latinos Unidos (MLU), a statewide network of organizations, businesses, and individuals dedicated to supporting Latino and immigrant communities in Maryland. We are writing to express our strong support for Senate Bill 459, which aims to alter the composition of the Maryland Efficient Grant Application Council and improve the efficiency of the grants process. We believe that this bill holds great potential to benefit both the Latino communities in Maryland and the state as a whole.

The Latino and immigrant communities in Maryland have long faced disparities and inequities in various aspects of life, including housing, education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Senate Bill 459 aligns with MLU's mission to address these issues and find equitable solutions through coordinated action. We believe that this bill can help Latino-serving nonprofits gain better access to grants, streamline the grants application process, and ultimately ensure that essential services reach the communities that need them the most.

Here are the key reasons why we believe Senate Bill 459 will be beneficial:

Improved Efficiency: This bill seeks to streamline and reduce redundant processes, reducing paperwork and administrative burdens on both granting agencies and grant recipients. This increased efficiency will benefit all communities, including Latinos, by ensuring that grants are awarded more effectively and in a timely manner.

Enhanced Access: By creating a State Grants Ombudsperson, the bill aims to provide technical assistance to grant applicants, helping them navigate the complexities of state grant programs. This support will empower Latino-serving nonprofits and other organizations to access vital funding opportunities that may have been challenging to access previously.

Equity and Inclusion: The bill's focus on diverse stakeholder input ensures that the voices of underrepresented communities, including Latinos, are heard in the grant-making process. This promotes greater equity and inclusion in the distribution of grants and resources.

SENATE



Testimony on SB 459 – Alterations to the Maryland Efficient Grant Application Council

Submitted by – Elise Saltzberg, Saltzberg Consulting

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Submitted to – Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

Date – February 7, 2024

Position – Favorable

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the extension of time for the Maryland Efficient Grant Application (MEGA) Council to meet. I have worked as a fundraising consultant for dozens of nonprofit organizations in Maryland since 2000, and I am testifying on their behalf – as well as on behalf of the 41,000 other nonprofits in the State of Maryland. With my assistance, over the years my clients have applied for and received dozens of grants and contracts from various State agencies and departments.

The MEGA Council was established for the purpose of streamlining and standardizing Maryland's grant application and reporting requirements, which are currently quite onerous and fragmented. Every agency has different requirements and even within agencies, a nonprofit responding to multiple RFP's and NOFO's may have to complete different narratives, different budget templates, etc. – even when they are applying for funding for essentially the same program. This is time-consuming and resource-draining and takes away from a nonprofit's ability to serve its constituency.

The COVID-19 pandemic and a lack of staff support prevented the MEGA Council from completing its work and making recommendations for improvements within the timeframe of the original legislation. SB 459 would extend the timeframe to 2028, which is more realistic. This bill also adds the Comptroller or her designee to the Council, which will assist in making sure that the final product is consistent with best practices and that it meets the needs of the nonprofits, the State agencies, and the people who are ultimately responsible for ensuring that the State's financial outlays are in the best interests of Maryland taxpayers.

The addition of the State Grants Ombudsperson position will assist in reaching these goals, as well. The Ombudsperson will also be helpful by providing technical assistance to nonprofits in accessing and navigating the state grants process; publicizing grant opportunities to nonprofits; and resolving delays in the grants process – which unfortunately happen frequently.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony. I request a favorable report on SB 459.



February 7, 2024

Testimony on Senate Bill 459
Grant Applications and Reporting - Maryland Efficient Grant Application Council -
Alterations
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

Position: Favorable

On behalf of Apra Maryland, the organization representing Maryland-area fundraising professionals dedicated to leveraging information and data to drive philanthropy, we support Senate Bill 459, which extends the vital work of the Maryland Efficient Grant Application Council.

The Maryland Efficient Grant Application Council plays a crucial role in informing the streamlining and improving the grant application process in our state. It studies uniform grant application forms, financial controls, and reporting requirements, ultimately reducing barriers and enhancing accountability in grant management. This, in turn, benefits both nonprofit organizations and government agencies, making it easier for them to navigate the grant-making process efficiently and effectively.

In the 2023 Regular Session, we made tremendous progress with SB112/HB328, approved by the governor, requiring the prompt payment of state grants. This legislation was a significant step forward in ensuring that nonprofits receive timely disbursements, alleviating financial burdens we often face. SB459 builds upon this progress by extending the Maryland Efficient Grant Application Council's work and further enhancing the efficiency of state grant administration.

The Council was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and a lack of staff support during the previous administration. Senate Bill 459 proposes several changes to the existing law related to the Council, with the most notable being the extension of the Council's termination date until at least 2028, a more realistic timeframe for completing its essential work.

Additionally, SB459 charges the Council with studying and making recommendations on the creation of a state grants ombudsperson, which will provide technical assistance to grant applicants, helping nonprofits access and navigate state grant programs, resolve delays in the grant-making process, and collect and disseminate information on grant opportunities. The creation of this ombudsperson will expedite problem resolution and improve the overall efficiency of grant administration.