

Testimony for **SB0085**
Corporations and Associations - Limited Worker Cooperative Associations - Authorization
(Maryland Limited Cooperative Association Act)
Position: **FAV**

Dear Chair Smith & members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

My name is Ethan Eblaghie and I am a former student member of the Baltimore City School Board and co-founder of the Baltimore Student Union, the largest grassroots student organization in Baltimore. BSU represents over 100 high school students in Baltimore and is a proud member of the **With Us For Us Community Wealth Building Coalition** (WUFU), which is working to hold anchor institutions accountable to investing in sustainable and community-centered urban development.

Worker cooperatives represent a key pillar of community across the state. ‘Third places’ for students have declined significantly in recent years as an escalating public safety crisis has resulted in changes in municipal policies towards youth curfews and restrictions on unaccompanied minors in public spaces. In a shrinking city like Baltimore, worker cooperatives are a growing, vibrant segment of community life that offers students safe & welcoming spaces to live and thrive. As a high school senior, cooperatives like Common Ground Cafe in Hampden and Red Emma’s Bookstore in Waverly have been well-maintained centers of recreation and activity that are responsive to the community and deeply invested in Baltimore. I have spent many an afternoon working through college and scholarship essays in these spaces.

However, running cooperatives is not easy. One of our community’s beloved worker-owned restaurants, Joe Squared in Penn North, closed its doors permanently last month. Extensive regulations surrounding setting up and maintaining cooperatives can present substantial obstacles to community members seeking to bring enterprise into community ownership, particularly in our historically redlined & disinvested Black & Brown neighborhoods. Each of the cooperatives I named sits in a white plurality community. SB0085 would help remove some of these regulatory barriers to creating worker cooperatives, which will help generate more enterprise guided by the cooperative model in Baltimore’s communities of color.

As a young Brown man, I would love to see cooperatives that cater to my immigrant community; worker-owned institutions in my city that speak my parents’ languages and are rooted in our neighborhoods. This legislation presents an actionable, realistic step towards that dream. I respectfully urge the committee to issue a favorable report on SB0085.

Sincerely,
Ethan Eblaghie