

Chapter 641

(House Bill 1118)

AN ACT concerning

Economic Development – Office of the Business Ombudsman – Establishment

FOR the purpose of establishing the Office of the Business Ombudsman in the Office of the Governor; specifying the purpose of the Office of the Business Ombudsman; requiring the Office to establish, maintain, and update each year a certain list of business assistance programs and services; requiring the Office to implement a certain business fairness and responsiveness service; requiring the Office to develop and maintain a certain program regarding permits required for business initiatives, projects, and activities; requiring the Office to establish and implement certain procedures to assist certain applicants for permits; requiring the Office to submit a certain report to the Governor and certain standing committees of the General Assembly each year; requiring the Governor to include certain funds in the State budget in certain fiscal years; defining certain terms; and generally relating to the Office of the Business Ombudsman.

BY adding to

Article – Economic Development

Section 14–201 through 14–204 to be under the new subtitle “Subtitle 2. Office of the Business Ombudsman”

Annotated Code of Maryland

(2008 Volume and 2013 Supplement)

SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND, That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

Article – Economic Development

SUBTITLE 2. OFFICE OF THE BUSINESS OMBUDSMAN.

14–201.

(A) IN THIS SUBTITLE THE FOLLOWING WORDS HAVE THE MEANINGS INDICATED.

(B) “OFFICE” MEANS OF THE OFFICE THE BUSINESS OMBUDSMAN.

(C) “OMBUDSMAN” MEANS AN INDIVIDUAL APPOINTED BY THE GOVERNOR WHO SERVES AS A LIAISON BETWEEN BUSINESSES, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS, COMMUNITIES, AND FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL UNITS AND AGENCIES.

14-202.

(A) THERE IS AN OFFICE OF THE BUSINESS OMBUDSMAN IN THE OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR.

(B) THE PURPOSE OF THE OFFICE IS TO:

(1) RESOLVE PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED BY BUSINESSES INTERACTING WITH STATE AGENCIES;

(2) FACILITATE RESPONSIVENESS OF STATE GOVERNMENT TO BUSINESS NEEDS;

(3) SERVE AS A CENTRAL CLEARINGHOUSE OF INFORMATION FOR BUSINESS ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS AND SERVICES AVAILABLE IN THE STATE;

(4) ASSIST BUSINESSES BY REFERRING BUSINESSES AND INDIVIDUALS TO RESOURCES THAT PROVIDE THE BUSINESS SERVICES OR ASSISTANCE REQUESTED;

(5) PROVIDE COMPREHENSIVE PERMIT INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE;

(6) ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN METRICS IN ORDER TO MONITOR THE PROGRESS OF THE OFFICE AND REPORT THE DATA TO THE GOVERNOR AND THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY; AND

(7) REPORT AND MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GOVERNOR AND THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY REGARDING BREAKDOWNS IN THE DELIVERY OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES AND PROGRAMS, INCLUDING PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED BY BUSINESSES INTERACTING WITH STATE AGENCIES.

14-203.

THE OFFICE SHALL:

(1) ESTABLISH, MAINTAIN, AND UPDATE EACH YEAR A LIST OF THE BUSINESS ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS AND SERVICES IN THE STATE, INCLUDING THE NAMES, LOCATIONS, WEB SITE ADDRESSES, AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS OF THE ENTITIES PROVIDING THE PROGRAMS AND SERVICES;

(2) IMPLEMENT A BUSINESS FAIRNESS AND RESPONSIVENESS SERVICE THAT:

(I) RESOLVES PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED BY BUSINESSES WITH OTHER STATE AGENCIES AND REGIONAL AND LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS;

(II) COORDINATES PROGRAMS AND SERVICES IMPLEMENTED BY FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL AGENCIES;

(III) FACILITATES RESPONSIVENESS OF STATE GOVERNMENT TO BUSINESS NEEDS; AND

(IV) REPORTS TO THE GOVERNOR AND THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY REGARDING ANY BREAKDOWNS IN THE DELIVERY OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES AND PROGRAMS;

(3) DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN A PROGRAM TO PROVIDE COMPREHENSIVE INFORMATION TO THE PUBLIC REGARDING PERMITS REQUIRED FOR BUSINESS INITIATIVES, PROJECTS, AND ACTIVITIES; AND

(4) ESTABLISH AND IMPLEMENT PROCEDURES TO ASSIST PERMIT APPLICANTS WHO HAVE ENCOUNTERED DIFFICULTIES IN OBTAINING TIMELY AND EFFICIENT PERMIT REVIEW.

14-204.

(A) (1) EACH YEAR, THE OFFICE SHALL SUBMIT A REPORT TO THE GOVERNOR AND, IN ACCORDANCE WITH § 2-1246 OF THE STATE GOVERNMENT ARTICLE, THE STANDING COMMITTEES OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY HAVING JURISDICTION OVER ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MATTERS.

(2) THE REPORT SHALL CONTAIN:

(I) INFORMATION REGARDING THE PERFORMANCE OF THE OFFICE, INCLUDING DATA INDICATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PROGRAMS AND PROCEDURES REGARDING PERMITTING;

(II) DATA SPECIFYING THE NUMBER OF BUSINESSES AND INDIVIDUALS THAT HAVE CONTACTED THE OFFICE OR USED THE SERVICES OF THE OFFICE; AND

(III) RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING IMPROVEMENTS TO EXISTING LAWS RELATING TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

(B) IN FISCAL YEAR 2016 AND IN EACH FISCAL YEAR THEREAFTER, THE GOVERNOR SHALL INCLUDE FUNDS IN THE STATE BUDGET TO IMPLEMENT THIS SUBTITLE, INCLUDING FUNDS TO:

- (1) EMPLOY A FULL-TIME OMBUDSMAN; AND**
- (2) OPERATE AND MAINTAIN AN OFFICE.**

SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect October 1, 2014.

Approved by the Governor, May 15, 2014.