

**KATIE FRY HESTER**  
*Legislative District 9*  
Carroll and Howard Counties

Education, Health, and  
Environmental Affairs Committee

Chair, Joint Committee on  
Cybersecurity, Information Technology  
and Biotechnology



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**THE SENATE OF MARYLAND**  
**ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401**

March 11, 2020

**Testimony in Support of SB984 - Department of General Services - State  
Innovation Program and Fund - Establishment**

Chairman Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee:

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 984. In my short two years in the Senate, I have had the opportunity to study a complex array of challenges, from cybersecurity to education to agriculture. I think you would all agree with me that most of these problems often require innovative solutions. We have an incredibly talented set of people working at our state agencies, but occasionally a problem requires fresh eyes and the right set of incentives to find the right solution.

This bill seeks to attract those fresh eyes and create those incentives. SB984 would create a State Innovation Program and associated Fund to allow state agencies to pose a challenge to the public, and offer a prize for the creation of an innovative solution to the agency's problem. Half the money for the prize associated with the challenge would have to come from the agency, while the other half would come from the fund associated with the State Innovation Program.

The Maryland Port Administration recently engaged in a similar effort for research and development activities associated with dredged material applications. A great deal of leg work had to be done on their part before proposals could even be solicited, but it has generated more public engagement on a unique problem for the generation of a more effective and innovative solution. Conceptually, this bill would create the standing infrastructure to allow other state agencies to participate in a similarly collaborative process with the public, without the initial hurdles that would generally be prohibitive.

This legislation is modeled after an existing program at the Federal level: Challenge.gov. Currently there are over 24 active solicitations in the Federal program, ranging from a DARPA solicitation for “breakthrough technologies and capabilities for underground operations,” to a “Fish Protection Prize” that would protect aquatic wildlife from water infrastructure such as pipes and hydropower dams.

The Maryland State Innovation Program could be an incredibly versatile tool for our state agencies to leverage when facing a complex problem. By partnering with the public, we as a community can break down the barriers between State agencies, the private sector, and the general public to come up with stronger solutions together. I respectfully request a favorable report for SB984.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katie Fry Hester". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Senator Katie Fry Hester  
Howard and Carroll County