



east baltimore development inc.

Community. Business. Opportunity.

February 9, 2021

Senator Paul G. Pinsky, Chair  
Senator Cheryl C. Kagan, Vice Chair  
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee  
2 West, Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Written Testimony Supporting Senate Bill 365 (Neighborhood Business Development Program - Food Desert Projects - Business Retention)

Dear Senators Pinsky, Kagan and members of the Committee:

On behalf of East Baltimore Development, Inc. (EBDI), I welcome the opportunity to submit to the record written testimony **in support** of Senate Bill 365 (SB 365). SB 365 would expand the objectives of the Neighborhood Business Development Program to include retaining certain businesses in food deserts and would provide financial assistance to businesses providing access to healthy food in food deserts. EBDI is acutely aware of the impact food deserts can have on a community and enthusiastically supports any efforts to minimize food insecurity.

EBDI was established in 2003 by community, government, institutional and philanthropic partners to stabilize and revitalize an 88-acre community in East Baltimore, which had suffered from years of disinvestment, blight, and crime. East Baltimore families and children have consistently experienced some of the worst outcomes in Baltimore's basic quality of life indicators, such as employment, health, educational achievement, adequate housing, and crime and safety. At EBDI, our charge is to execute an ambitious plan to transform the neighborhood into a healthier, thriving community, now called Eager Park. Since redevelopment has begun, Eager Park now includes over 400 completed mixed-income homeownership and rental housing units; over one million square feet of new commercial office, lab, and retail space; a hotel; a community learning campus with an early childhood center and a public K-8 school; and a new 5-acre park. When completed, the project will include 1,600 total units of housing and additional retail, life sciences, research and office space.

Despite the overwhelming success EBDI has had in redeveloping Eager Park, the community has suffered from food insecurity for decades. EBDI, in partnership with Baltimore Development Corp., is striving to attract a grocer to Eager Park or an adjacent East Baltimore community. However, according to the latest market study EBDI procured in June 2020, securing a permanent grocery store within the project area is likely years ahead. In the meantime, the residents of Eager Park and its surrounding neighborhoods continue to struggle to access fresh food options in and near their communities. To make matters worse, in September 2020, one of the last grocery stores within the vicinity of the project area closed its doors.

The lack of a grocery store has negatively impacted Eager Park residents, many of whom have limited or no access to transportation to travel to other grocery stores. EBDI is working closely with the Eager Park Neighborhood Association to explore alternatives to grocery stores, including food co-ops and a farmer's market, but these opportunities will not satisfy the full need of Eager Park and our neighboring communities. Thus, EBDI considers it critical to attract and retain businesses of all sizes to Eager Park and East Baltimore that work to eliminate food insecurity.

I hope that you will move for a favorable report of SB 365. Thank you for the opportunity to share my written testimony in support.

Sincerely,

Cheryl Washington  
President & CEO