

HFAM Testimony SB 896 Final.pdf

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**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE
SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE**

March 10, 2021

Senate Bill 896: Workgroup on the COVID-19 Crisis Economic Recovery

Written Testimony Only

POSITION: FAVORABLE

On behalf of the members of the Health Facilities Association of Maryland (HFAM), we appreciate the opportunity to express our support for Senate Bill 896: Workgroup on the COVID-19 Crisis Economic Recovery.

HFAM represents over 170 skilled nursing centers and assisted living communities in Maryland, as well as nearly 80 associate businesses that offer products and services to healthcare providers. Our members provide services and employ individuals in nearly every jurisdiction of the state. HFAM members provide the majority of post-acute and long-term care to Marylanders in need: 6 million days of care across all payer sources annually, including more than 4 million Medicaid days of care and one million Medicare days of care.

Senate Bill 896 would establish the Workgroup on the COVID-19 Crisis Economic Recovery, which will make recommendations regarding how the State may best cope with the economic challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and in particular the economic effect of the pandemic on telehealth, telework, online education, unemployment compensation, tax system modernization, changes in real estate, rebuilding the public health system, and other impacts on public service.

We have covered a great deal of ground in our fight against COVID-19 over the last year. The fact we are now talking about vaccine deployment is a credit to our scientists and our medical-industrial complex.

As distribution of COVID-19 vaccines continue, long-term care centers have seen a major decline in the number of new cases among residents and staff. Nationally, the number of COVID cases among residents in nursing homes has fallen by 89 percent since mid-December when cases were at their peak, according to data from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). New resident cases are also at their lowest levels since the CMS began tracking data in May 2020.

While there is a light at the end of the tunnel thanks to vaccine distribution, all industries and businesses across Maryland will be dealing with lasting impacts of the pandemic for years to come. It is critical that we proactively find opportunities in the challenges highlighted by this crisis.

Due to the nature of the virus relative to our patients and diverse communities, long-term and post-acute care centers have been on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic for more than a year. The pandemic has highlighted the chronic underfunding of Medicaid in our sector, workforce recruitment and retention challenges, and the aging physical infrastructure of our sector in Maryland and across the country.

Expenses related to fighting COVID-19 were at historic highs while revenues were at historic lows. Throughout the pandemic, our centers faced unprecedented costs on personal protective equipment (PPE), staffing, and hero pay bonuses while dealing with a loss of revenue due to declined census and observation and isolation requirements.

Across industries COVID-19 has taken not only a financial toll, but it has taken an emotional toll on workers, impacted the way business is done, and has changed the day-to-day lives of individuals and families. We must make time to identify challenges brought on and highlighted by the pandemic and find solutions going forward. Together we have a tremendous opportunity to work in partnership to rebuild, reform, and come back stronger than before.

We are thankful for the Committee's leadership on behalf of Marylanders in need. We look forward to our continued work together to protect quality care and support healthcare jobs.

For these reasons, we request a favorable report from the Committee on Senate Bill 896.

Submitted by:

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SB0896-3.10.21-- workgroup on Covid Recovery.final

Uploaded by: Fry, Donald

Position: FWA



POSITION STATEMENT

TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL 896 -- Workgroup on the COVID-19 Crisis Economic Recovery

Senator Rosapepe

March 10, 2021

DONALD C. FRY

PRESIDENT & CEO

GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE

Position: Support with Amendments

Senate Bill 896 establishes a Workgroup on the COVID-19 Crisis Economic Recovery. The workgroup's members would include five senators, five delegates, and the cabinet secretaries of the Departments of Labor, Commerce, Transportation, and Housing and Community Development. The workgroup would be charged with making recommendations regarding how the State may best cope with the economic challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and in particular the economic effect of the pandemic on: telehealth; telework; online education, from kindergarten to graduate programs; unemployment compensation; tax system modernization; changes in real estate such as office space, retail, residential, rental and ownership, and community economic centers; rebuilding the public health system; and other impacts on public services. The bill allows the group to hire consultant services, and states that \$500,000 shall be appropriated for that purpose. The bill requires an interim report by December 31, 2021 and a final report by December 31, 2022.

The Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) is in full support of the intent of Senate Bill 896, and recognizes the need to act to deal with the COVID-19 related economic crisis. The GBC has been actively involved in supporting businesses as they weather the ill effects of the pandemic, restrictions limiting business operations, and the resulting negative economic impact on the business. To address the challenges and to help businesses recover, the Greater Baltimore Committee created the GBC COVID-19 Business Recovery Advisory Council. The advisory council, comprised of business executive of Baltimore regional businesses, was formed to provide assistance, create programs, and make policy recommendations to benefit small and minority-owned businesses. The work of the GBC COVID-19 Business Recovery Advisory Council examined many of these issues and can serve as a model for State action on this subject.

Proposed Amendments

The GBC recommends a number of amendments that would strengthen the proposed workgroup and its ability to help Maryland government agencies, businesses, and residents recover from this crisis. The amendments focus on two areas: Workgroup membership and the timeline for workgroup action and funding.

Workgroup Membership

The charge of the workgroup covers a broad range of issues, including education, public health, unemployment compensation, business related issues such as unemployment compensation, the tax system, and real estate. The membership of the workgroup, however, does not fully represent these interests. The GBC believes an amendment is needed to alter or increase the membership of the workgroup to include the heads of all agencies related to the charge of the Workgroup.

With two health related charges, and an education related charge that relates to pre-K through higher education, it would be prudent to include the State Superintendent of Schools, the Secretary of Higher Education, and the Secretary of Health.

GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE

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In addition, representatives of the business community should be added to the Workgroup. While cabinet secretaries deal with the issues involved in their subject areas, they are not able to fully represent the interests of actual businesses. The GBC proposed adding four members representing business organizations.

Workgroup Charge

The GBC recommends adding several topic areas to the charge of the workgroup. First, childcare challenges are a major issue for Maryland's businesses and families, and we recommend including it in the list of areas to examine.

In addition, despite the inclusion of the Secretary of Transportation on the workgroup, there are no transportation issues listed specifically in the workgroup charge. The GBC recommends including an examination of commuting pattern changes, access to employment, and economic challenges resulting from inadequate transportation options for many Marylanders.

Workgroup Timeline and Funding

The GBC is concerned with several issues related to the timeline for the Workgroup. The first relates to the \$500,000 appropriation for a consultant. The bill does not require the Governor to include that funding in the budget, so it is unclear if the money would actually be available to pay a consultant. In addition, even if the funds were appropriated, it is unlikely to happen prior to the Fiscal 2023 budget. If the funds are not available until July 1, 2022, it is doubtful that a consultant could complete its work prior to the December 31, 2022 deadline. The GBC is also concerned that the call for a final report in December of 2022 may be too late to help the countless Maryland businesses and families struggling to survive the COVID-19 economic crisis.

This bill is consistent with the GBC's Legislative Priorities for 2021, which include a call to advocate for policy, funding, and regulatory solutions to accelerate economic recovery with an emphasis on support for small and minority-owned businesses.

For these reasons, the Greater Baltimore Committee urges a favorable report with the addition of the proposed amendments on Senate Bill 896.

The Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) is a non-partisan, independent, regional business advocacy organization comprised of hundreds of businesses -- large, medium and small -- educational institutions, nonprofit organizations and foundations located in Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Harford, and Howard counties as well as Baltimore City. The GBC is a 66-year-old, private-sector membership organization with a rich legacy of working with government to find solutions to problems that negatively affect our competitiveness and viability.

SB896 Favorable with Amendment.pdf

Uploaded by: mcavoy, vince

Position: FWA

Dear Senators,

I urge you and your Committee members to include people from the public on this Workgroup.

•• UnEvenly Applied Inequity ••

State workers, teachers, politicians have realized the benefit of being paid to sit at home and work while drinking chardonnay; but small- to medium-sized businesses have suffered the brunt of this. The people on this Workgroup have no skin in the game of securing PROMPT recovery. When have senators marched around DLLR or State Circle demanding benefits for people wrongfully unemployed and the denied benefits? Or fought for immediate opening of businesses as they approached bankruptcy? Are suicide deaths okay? Is COVID the only health metric that social media and fake news outlets will allow you to discuss?

More polite commentary & discourse is not helping the 30,000+ Maryland businesses closed due to executive overreaction to a flu.

•• Increased Burden on Courts ••

As normal people are being terrorized by criminals, Maryland's answer is to de-fund & de-fang the law enforcement taxes pay for. Adrienne Jones' "black agenda" has been focused on releasing criminals and DE-criminalizing drugs??!?? Incredible! Is this what she believes to be the essence of black people in a crisis? Of what's most important to us?

This, in spite of increases in murder, robbery, domestic violence and outright lawlessness. For the last year, the courts are closed to most of Maryland residents. This includes timely processing of those arrested (which is a breach from the U.S. Constitution and Due Process). But more importantly than processing criminals is timely processing of child custody issues. Literally no legislator has spoken on this issue. Not one! You need someone who knows and can speak to wrongfully denied child-visitation/child-custody matters. By my estimate, 40 percent of Maryland's men are fathers.

AMEND BILL

I urge you to include people on this taskforce who have **urgency in fighting for citizen rights.**

Various taskforces on Maryland's unemployment agency, family law courts, right to pursue trade/business operation et cetera is under attack by this state and by its executive. Combating this tyranny is vital.

Thank you for your votes & your consideration.

humbly
~vince