



March 5, 2021

The Honorable Anne R. Kaiser, Chair
House Ways and Means Committee
House Office Building, Room 131
6 Bladen St,
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chair Kaiser and Members of the Ways and Means Committee:

The Anne Arundel Economic Development Corporation (AAEDC) supports HB 1303 and encourages a favorable report.

The bill provides an opportunity for the small, minority- and woman-owned businesses that struggle disproportionately during disasters. By providing a “second chance” to be compliant with the State’s eligibility requirements, this bill provides assistance to those small businesses that need it most.

During the pandemic, we learned a lot at AAEDC. We learned that business owners of color were hit hardest. A study from the University of California, Santa Cruz cites 40% of African-American business owners either closed their businesses or were close to doing so in the first three months of the pandemic. Latin-X business owners were almost as high at 34% and women-owned business were struggling at a 32% rate. Finding solutions to assist those businesses that suffer most in a state of emergency is critically important.

Each of our grant programs presented unique challenges, but one they shared was some applicants not having the proper application materials. We often work with the small businesses in the county to find proxy documents to show that the required documents are being pursued. We believe HB 1303 does help small businesses the same way.

The intent of all these funding programs is to keep businesses viable through the pandemic. A favorable report of HB 1303 will give those small businesses an additional and important tool to access those resources. At AAEDC we’ve seen first-hand that this type of flexibility makes a difference to a small business.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ben Birge". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "B" and "B".

Benjamin J. Birge
President/CEO