

 **POSITION STATEMENT****TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE SENATE BUDGET & TAXATION COMMITTEE****SENATE BILL 228 – Maryland Corps Program-Revisions****Sponsor – Senator Ferguson****February 9, 2022****DONALD C. FRY****PRESIDENT & CEO****GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE****Position: Support**

Senate Bill 228 creates and funds a quasi-public agency focused on coordinating service opportunities in the State of Maryland that match 21st century needs of participants and communities through the expansion of service year and national service opportunities. The bill would remove barriers to entry so those who would benefit most from service years have the ability to participate in the program. It would also build new pathways to service by scaling up service slots with existing organizations, incentivizing large-scale employers to offer service year opportunities, and building opportunities within State and local government.

The Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) supports Senate Bill 228 as it enhances the role of Maryland Corps to serve as an intermediary with both the federal government and the private sector, allowing for effective, targeted coordination to address the state's most pressing needs. Many existing service programs create unintentional barriers to entry, largely due to insufficient monetary stipends and benefits. This bill would mitigate this issue by funding all service slots with the equivalent of a \$15 an hour stipend, health insurance, and the potential for wraparound services including but not limited to child care, transportation, housing, mental health services, and more. It would also provide a \$6,000 education award through a tax-exempt Maryland 529 account to participants who complete a nine month term of service, eliminating unforeseen tax burdens created through similar programs. Similarly, individuals who complete a service year through Maryland Corps would become automatically eligible for in-state tuition.

The other much needed component of this legislation is a sustainable funding mechanism designed to expand service opportunities in every region of the State to meet each area's individual needs. By Maryland Corps acting as an intermediary with AmeriCorps, the administrative burden placed on local organizations will be mitigated, thereby allowing them to easily access funding and create service slots. A matching fund for large-scale employers will incentivize institutions like hospitals, universities, and other private sector employers to create service slots to meet growing workforce needs.

This approach is consistent with one of the core pillars for a competitive business environment and job growth outlined in the GBC report, *Gaining A Competitive Edge: Keys to Economic Growth and Job Creation in Maryland*:

**Government leadership that unites with business as a partner.** Maryland leaders must set a welcoming tone that communicates positive support for business, respect for the private sector as a partner, not an adversary, and reflects a strategic plan for business growth and job creation

**For these reasons, the Greater Baltimore Committee urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 228.**

*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 67-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.*

**GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE**

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