



# POSITION STATEMENT

## TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE SENATE BUDGET AND TAXATION COMMITTEE

### SENATE BILL 904 – MARYLAND HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION – FORMERLY INCARCERATED YOUTH GRANT PROGRAM – ESTABLISHED

Sponsor – Senator Benson

March 10, 2022

**DONALD C. FRY**  
**PRESIDENT & CEO**  
**GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE**

#### **Position: Support**

Senate Bill 904 would establish the Formerly Incarcerated Youth Grant Program to provide formerly incarcerated students who receive federal Pell Grants with matching state funds to attend a Maryland postsecondary institution. Grants would be equal to the amount of the federal Pell Grant that the eligible student received up to \$3,000. Eligibility would be limited to state residents under the age of 26 who have been incarcerated and are eligible for federal Pell Grants in that year. The program would be administered by the Office of Financial Assistance within the Maryland Higher Education Commission and the Division of Parole and Probation would provide grant information to individuals who might be eligible.

The Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) contends that expanding access to education, especially for formerly incarcerated individuals, is integral to reducing recidivism. According to a study by Emory University, recidivism rates are inversely proportion to an individual's level of education; recidivism rates for people with an Associate's degree was 13.7%, for a Bachelor's degree 5.6%, and for a Master's degree 0%.

A significant barrier to higher education for formerly incarcerated individuals is the prohibitive costs of enrollment. Senate Bill 904 provides much needed assistance to formerly incarcerated students to overcome that barrier. Making postsecondary education more affordable will provide these individuals with a better chance to obtain and maintain steady employment, which leads to lower recidivism rates, improved public safety, a more robust workforce, and a strengthened economy.

Creating and nurturing a strong workforce is one of the Greater Baltimore Committee's most important priorities. Without a strong workforce, Maryland's economy cannot innovate, grow, and create jobs. The GBC's *Preparing for the Future: A Regional Workforce Development Initiative* was created to ensure that the region's high-growth industries have a pipeline of highly skilled workers who can contribute to future economic growth. A report was released in late 2020 outlining recommendations to meet the workforce needs. Since the report's issuance, the GBC has regularly convened a diverse network of stakeholders to assist in the implementation of the recommendations. A number of the recommendations in the *Preparing for the Future* report involve significant policy reform to reduce education and employment barriers for justice-involved populations. Senate Bill 904 aligns with these recommendations by enabling formerly incarcerated individuals to get the credentials necessary to obtain family supporting occupations and providing economic opportunities.

In addition to its alignment with the *Preparing for the Future* report, Senate Bill 904 is consistent with one of the core pillars for a competitive business environment and job growth outlined in the GBC report entitled *Gaining a Competitive Edge: Keys to Economic Growth and Job Creation in Maryland*. A key pillar identified is as follows:

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**Workforce that is highly-educated and meets Maryland's business needs.** Maryland's secondary and higher education institutions must offer access to quality instruction at all levels and cultivate a workforce that is well-suited to a modern economy and to the specific needs of Maryland's business sectors.

**For these reasons, the Greater Baltimore Committee urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 904.**

*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.*