



POSITION STATEMENT

TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE HOUSE ECONOMIC MATTERS COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL 1424 – WORKGROUP ON THE POST-COVID-19 CRISIS ECONOMIC TRANSITION
Sponsors – Delegate R. Lewis

March 30, 2022

DONALD C. FRY
PRESIDENT & CEO
GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE

Position: Support with Amendments

House Bill 1424 establishes a Workgroup on the Post-COVID-19 Crisis Economic Transition. The workgroup's members would include four senators, four delegates, five members of the business sector, one member of the state nonprofit sector appointed by the Governor 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 address the economic challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and in particular the economic effect of the pandemic. The bill requires an interim report by December 1, 2022 and a final report by December 1, 2023.

The Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) is in full support of the intent of House Bill 1424, 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 to assist 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.

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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.

Workgroup Charge

The GBC recommends adding an additional topic area to the charge of the workgroup. 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.

This bill is consistent with the GBC's COVID recovery position, 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 House Bill 1424.

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.