



February 9, 2023

Chair Atterbeary and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee
House Office Building, Room 131
6 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: HB270

Dear Chair Atterbeary and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee:

Thank you for your consideration of House Bill 270, which seeks to raise the annual available amount of tax credits for film production in Maryland.

I'm Towanda Underdue, a full-time professional actor and voiceover artist for over 20 years born, raised, and currently living in Baltimore. I am a proud first-generation college graduate of Towson University and attended the Baltimore Polytechnic Institute. I am glad to have grown up here and to now make my living in the state of Maryland. I currently serve as National Board member of the Washington-Mid Atlantic Local of SAG-AFTRA, the union of over 5,000 local members of professional actors, broadcasters and performing artists. We are the third largest local outside of Los Angeles and New York, though sadly with the least tax incentives comparatively. We as the Washington-Mid Atlantic Local of SAG-AFTRA, urge you to pass HB270.

It is important to realize that an increase to the tax credit is not a giveaway to red carpet VIPs in Hollywood. It is a boost to those living and working here like me. Also, this is a rebate on money spent in our state - and the rebate only occurs after the production has finished. There is no upfront spending needed. It's simply a win-win. This incentive program makes such a big difference in the lives of our members that it allows them to put food on the table and have access to decent health care and retirement benefits. These are tangible benefits to Marylanders.

The life of an actor working on a film or a television production, even for one day, earns the performer a living wage. It also means residual payments for years to come when the film is streamed online, distributed in foreign markets, or shown on cable television. The effects of this work has a ripple effect on our lives that is felt in subsequent years. It puts money into my pocket and the pockets of my co-stars, but it also creates an ongoing tax revenue stream for Maryland.

Background performers also benefit from this program. With the work available due to the projects *FLAMINGO* and *LIONESS* this past year, some background performers I know have been able to qualify for health insurance for the first time in several years because of the work they had access to as a stand-in and general background performers. This work is so important for our members as it allows them to make their health insurance and pension minimums, thereby reducing the impact on state programs.

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But, it isn't just for myself and my fellow actors, a film or television production generates work for thousands of people who live here. These are high-paying career positions that create work in many areas in front of and behind the camera, for example all of the crew positions needed to build the sets, move the gear, and transport the cast. It also translates to generating work in the community due to a need for rental cars, catering, security, set dressing, wardrobe pieces, hotel rooms and real estate.

The Motion Picture Association estimates that a good sized production spends about \$250,000 a day when filming. That money has a direct effect on the local economy. HBO's *Veep*, which moved its production to California for the last three seasons in part because of our unstable tax credit program, generated over \$165 million worth of impact on Maryland's economy while it was here. Think of what this proposed increase to our tax incentive program could do for our state, by doubling and ultimately quadrupling our current tax cap levels!

Tax incentives have changed the way that film and television production is done in this country. A quick inquiry into the film incentives in Georgia, which has no cap, will show the program as a well documented success. Massachusetts, also with no cap on its film incentive program, has seen productions soar in recent years. I would like to stay and work in Maryland as often as I can, but due to the tax incentives available in other states, I often must leave in order to work. When my agent calls me to travel to Atlanta for the projects, 'The Other Black Girl' and 'Star Girl' or in New York for shows, 'Wu Tang: An American Saga' and 'BULL,' I'm excited to work but apprehensive. The logistics of extra travel days, lodging, deciding if it's best to go by plane, train or automobile and travel safety are at the forefront.

Increasing the annual amount of tax credits for film production in Maryland to \$25 million in fiscal year 2024 and \$50 million in fiscal year 2025 and beyond will accomplish several things.

First, it will enable more than one major production at a time to be covered in the state.

Second, the industry thrives in a stable environment and a stable, vibrant film incentive program would make a tremendous difference. Production companies plan in advance, and will simply choose another state without assurance that our tax incentives are stable and consistent.

Financially, this increase would not only create more well-paying jobs, but would encourage new investments in infrastructure and allow the many workers who make their living in the film industry to stay and thrive here in Maryland. It gives students a career path to pursue. Growing the television and film industry positively impacts our state's tourism. Our state is so beautiful and it has so many diverse and versatile locations for productions to showcase. When shown on screen, our scenic glamor adds invaluable marketing power to our travel and tourism initiatives. Let our state be a template to locals across the nation.

For the thousands of taxpayers who are part of the creative community here in Maryland, SAG-AFTRA actors, IATSE production crew members, Teamster drivers, DGA assistant directors, small business owners, and other workers, I urge you to pass HB270.

Respectfully submitted,

Towanda Underdue
National Board Member, Washington-Mid Atlantic Local
SAG-AFTRA