



MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

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**HB 552 - Economic Development - Build Our Future Grant Pilot Program and Fund (Innovation Economy Infrastructure Act of 2023)
House Ways and Means Committee
February 16, 2023**

INFORMATION

Donna S. Edwards

President

Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO

Madame Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to HB 552 as currently written. My name is Donna S. Edwards, and I am the President of the Maryland State and District of Columbia AFL-CIO. On behalf of Maryland's 300,000 union members, I offer the following comments.

HB 552 creates a pilot program for the Build Our Future grant program and fund. The program aims to promote and assist infrastructure projects that will help Maryland become a leader in high technology sectors like advanced manufacturing, aerospace, cyber security, robotics, and biotech. Grants can be awarded to private businesses, non-profits, colleges and universities, and local governments. Grant winners can receive up to \$2,000,000 from the state with minimal requirements.

Maryland can and should be a leader in high tech industries. Our highly educated workforce and unique location, with proximity to the federal government and major transportation hubs, make our state well-suited for the economies of the future. Unfortunately, we cannot support a bill that issues millions of dollars to businesses, non-profits, and governments that does not guarantee the creation of high road jobs.

The bill states that the Secretary for the Department of Commerce is empowered to create regulations to help carry out the Build Our Future program, but this language is too vague to give Maryland's taxpayers the assurance they need that our tax money will not be used to create low paying jobs with no benefits. We cannot use taxpayer money without demanding certain job standards are met.

The State must demand that if it is using taxpayer money to help businesses, non-profits, or local governments that these entities comply with good job standards like: providing career advancement opportunities, the right to collectively bargain, paid leave, unemployment insurance and workers' compensation verification, employer provide health Insurance, and retirement benefits.

The public deserves to know how much money will be placed into this grant fund. The only caps we currently see in the bill are limits on how much recipients can receive as an entity. We do not see any allocations in the proposed FY2024 budget to fill this fund either.

For these reasons we urge the committee to issue an unfavorable report for HB 552.