



DOWNTOWN PARTNERSHIP

February 29, 2024

The Honorable Ben Barnes
Chair - House Appropriations Committee
Room 121
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chairman Barnes:

I am writing to urge your support - and that of your Committee colleagues - for HB0897, as introduced by the Baltimore City Delegation to establish the Baltimore Convention and Tourism Redevelopment and Operating Authority Task Force to make recommendations regarding the proper authority to oversee the renovation, revitalization and financing, as well as ongoing management of the Baltimore Convention Center.

For over 40 years, it's been the mission of Downtown Partnership "to promote, advance, and stimulate the economic health and vitality of downtown." Essential to the vitality and economic strength of Downtown, however, is our ability to attract visitors from near and far and to compete with other major cities on the eastern seaboard especially, as well as cities known for their ability to attract major convention business consistently.

As Governor Wes Moore has asserted, "This is Maryland's decade, but Baltimore's time." And yet for us to fully realize the enormous potential before us requires that we invest in our essential assets to ensure that Baltimore is sufficiently competitive with other cities vying for business, residents, and tourism. Our Convention Center, now 45-years old, has had only one significant renovation in that period, almost 30-years ago, resulting in a backlog of deferred renovations estimated to cost at least \$100 million. And yet, at least 14 other destinations are currently making major investments in their convention centers, compounding the challenges of our colleagues at Visit Baltimore and the Convention Center to attract convention and tourism business going forward. The substandard condition of Baltimore's Convention Center complex, as I'm sure you know, has necessitated extending substantial discounts as a means to incentivizing

Page 2
The Honorable Ben Barnes
HB0897

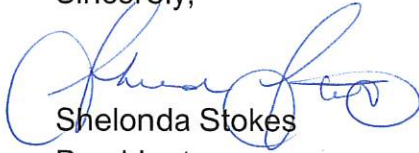
decision makers to still choose Baltimore, despite superior convention facilities elsewhere. This unsustainable approach has only exacerbated the Convention Center's annual deficit which the State and City - and ultimately Maryland taxpayers - must bear.

The establishment of this special Task Force is a vital step in the process of developing well-informed approaches to improving the Convention Center's business model, as well as how best to begin planning for the much-needed revitalization of the facilities. Delaying further this important work will only serve to jeopardize the longer-term economic prospects of Baltimore and our region.

On behalf of Downtown Partnership and all who are working to realize the potential that Downtown Baltimore represents and offers businesses, residents, and visitors, we encourage your Committee's and the House of Delegates' full support for HB0897, and the successful consideration of its companion legislation in the Senate.

Thank you for your leadership and for prioritizing consideration of this timely legislation.

Sincerely,



Shelonda Stokes
President