



POSITION STATEMENT

Written Testimony to the Finance Committee

SB.896/HB.897 – Baltimore Convention and Tourism Redevelopment and Operating Authority Task Force

Sponsors:

Senator Carter (By Request - Baltimore City Administration)

February 29, 2024

Position: Support

Dear Members of the Finance Committee,

On behalf of the Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC), I write to you in support of SB.896, Baltimore Convention and Tourism Redevelopment and Operating Authority Task Force.

As the leading voice for the private sector in the Baltimore region, GBC is actively engaged in collective efforts to grow a dynamic and inclusive regional economy. A revitalized downtown Baltimore is vital to that growth. But investment in our core will not happen without a modernized Baltimore Convention Center (BCC). When the BCC is successful, restaurants, hotels, and small businesses also grow and thrive, which in turn benefits residents of the entire region. Moreover, all sales tax from Baltimore accrues to the state, thus making a vibrant BCC impactful statewide. In that light, BCC is truly the State's Convention Center, too.

Unfortunately, leads for city-wide conventions are down, a trend that began even before COVID (-15% between 2015-19). This is in large part because the BCC is the oldest and smallest center in its comp set and as a city agency doesn't have the tools that its competition has (including secondary income sources to offset incentives and address deferred maintenance). Meanwhile, over a dozen cities have made significant renovations or constructed new buildings in recent years. We are now competing with not just the Pittsburghs, Bostons, and Nashvilles but also Columbus, Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Savannah—all of which have modern centers that keep associations from even looking at Baltimore as a venue for their meetings and events.

By establishing this Task Force, Baltimore City will be able to study and develop recommendations on the future of the BCC site and ensure that any future plans and governance of the site will reflect the needs of the City. Such governance will not only make the current BCC nimble but will lay the groundwork for a renewed center that not only meets the industry's future needs but will be a key contributor to Baltimore's renaissance.

We hope you will issue a favorable report on this bill.

Sincerely,

Mark Anthony Thomas
President & Chief Executive Officer

GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE

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