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SB0904

February 23, 2024

TO: Members of the Senate Finance Committee

FROM: Nina Themelis, Director of Mayor's Office of Government Relations

RE: Senate Bill 904 – Baltimore City – Alcoholic Beverages – Class B Beer, Wine, and Liquor Licenses

POSITION: POSITION

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Klausmeier, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** Senate Bill (SB) 904.

SB 904 would reduce the requirements for obtaining a Class B (restaurant) liquor license within Baltimore City's downtown area. This initiative is a critical component of our broader Downtown RISE action plan, aimed at revitalizing our central business district during a challenging economic period and before significant developments, such as Harborplace, come to fruition.

Our current liquor licensing requirements impose significant barriers to entry for new and existing restaurants. Specifically, the high thresholds for capital investment and seating capacity, coupled with stringent food sales ratios, disproportionately affect smaller establishments and those looking to occupy previously used spaces without the need for substantial investment in infrastructure.

By relaxing these requirements, this bill would help to foster a more vibrant, diverse, and economically resilient downtown area. This will not only help fill vacant storefronts, thereby enhancing the urban fabric, but also stimulate job creation, increase tax revenues, and improve the overall quality of life for our residents and visitors alike.

The proposed legislation is crafted to sunset after four years, allowing the BCA to assess its effectiveness and make necessary adjustments moving forward. This temporary measure is a thoughtful response to the immediate needs of our downtown area, reflecting our commitment to adaptive, responsive governance.

For the above reasons, the BCA respectfully requests a favorable report on SB 904.