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MAYOR

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SB0896

March 1, 2024

TO: Members of the Senate Finance Committee

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

RE: Senate Bill 896 – Baltimore Convention and Tourism Redevelopment and Operating Authority Task Force

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Klausmeier, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** Senate Bill (SB) 896.

SB 896 would create the Baltimore Convention and Tourism Redevelopment and Operating Authority Task Force. This Task Force would study and then make suggestions regarding the membership, purpose, and function of an Authority to lead the renovation and renewal of the downtown Baltimore Convention Center and neighboring Inner Harbor.

The downtown Baltimore area heavily contributes to the well-being of the City of Baltimore, and serves as a hub for tourism, industry, and business – not only for itself, but also surrounding counties. It is a world-class destination for those who live, work, play and visit the area. The Baltimore Convention Center (BCC) plays a significant role in this designation by attracting business meetings, competitive sports, and engaging conventions.

However, the BCC is woefully underfunded. Last year, the Maryland General Assembly provided \$25.7 million in funding for much needed repairs to the BCC. The majority of that funding was dedicated to emergency repairs needed for the facility. A portion of this funding was directed to modernization efforts. Those efforts include conducting a market study, producing architectural and mechanical drawings, and providing financial estimates for a future Convention Center. The Task Force as defined in SB 896 will use the results of those modernization efforts to inform the final recommendations as required in the legislation. In order to remain competitive with surrounding jurisdictions and continue to generate recurring revenue for both the City of Baltimore and the State of Maryland, it is imperative that we take these steps now to plan for the future of the Baltimore Convention site.

For the above reasons, the BCA respectfully requests a **favorable** report on SB 896.