



February 20, 2024

Chair Beidle and Members of the Committee:

My name is Darryl Barnes and I serve as President & CEO of the Bi-County Business Roundtable. The purpose of this letter is to express our strong support of Senate Bill 511. This crucial piece of legislation seeks to expand the apprenticeship ratio for non-hazardous occupations, a move that we believe will have significant positive impacts on small business growth in Maryland and the empowerment of underserved populations.

The Bi-County Business Roundtable represents a diverse coalition of small businesses across Maryland, many of whom face significant challenges in accessing skilled labor and navigating the complexities of workforce development programs. Senate Bill 511 presents a unique opportunity to address these challenges head-on by streamlining the apprenticeship process and opening doors for small businesses to participate more effectively in registered apprenticeship programs.

One of the key benefits of Senate Bill 511 is its potential to level the playing field for small businesses seeking to access government resources available for employers participating in registered apprenticeships. Currently, the process for participating in apprenticeships is undeniably onerous, resulting in many small businesses being unable to fully leverage the resources and support available to them. By expanding the apprenticeship ratio for non-hazardous occupations, this bill will make it more worthwhile for small businesses to engage in apprenticeship programs and thereby access the vital resources they need to grow and thrive.

Moreover, Senate Bill 511 holds the promise of empowering underserved populations by creating more pathways to meaningful employment and career advancement. Apprenticeship programs offer individuals the opportunity to gain valuable skills and experience while earning a living wage, providing a critical lifeline for those who may face barriers to traditional forms of education and employment. By expanding access to apprenticeship opportunities, particularly in non-hazardous occupations, we can bridge the opportunity gap and ensure that all Marylanders have the chance to succeed in the workforce.

In conclusion, the Bi-County Business Roundtable urges the Committee to support Senate Bill 511 and take decisive action to expand apprenticeship ratios for non-hazardous occupations. This legislation represents a critical step forward in promoting small business growth, empowering underserved populations, and leveling the playing field for all Maryland businesses.

Sincerely,

Darryl Barnes

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President & CEO

Bi-County Business Roundtable

