



ASHLAR GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

February 20, 2024

House Health & Government Operations Committee  
Economic Matters Committee

**House Bill 856 - Procurement - Minority Business Enterprise Program - Work Performed by a Regulated Lobbyist or Government Relations Firm**

Position: SUPPORT

Dear Members of the House Health & Government Operations Committee and House Economic Matters Committee,

As a small business owner deeply invested in the prosperity and diversity of our local economy, I stand in strong support of House Bill 856, which aims to enhance the Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) Program within Maryland's procurement process. This legislation is not just a step towards more inclusive business practices but a leap towards creating a more equitable economic landscape for all, especially for businesses like mine that strive to make meaningful contributions to our community.

The expansion of MBE Program Eligibility under House Bill 856, allowing activities by regulated lobbyists or government relations firms that are certified MBEs to count towards the MBE participation goals, is a commendable move. It recognizes the diverse ways in which minority businesses contribute to the state's economy and opens new avenues for their participation in state procurement processes (Blount, 2015; Carrington, 2015). As someone who navigates the complexities of small business operations daily, I see this as an opportunity to level the playing field and foster a business environment that values diversity and inclusivity.

Moreover, the bill's focus on Overall MBE Participation Goals resonates with the need for structured, goal-oriented approaches to enhance minority business participation in state contracts. By setting specific guidelines and goals biennially, the bill ensures a targeted effort towards increasing MBE participation, reflecting a commitment to not just diversity in numbers but in impactful economic engagement (Blount, 2020).

The emphasis on Contractor Compliance and Corrective Action further assures businesses like mine that there is a framework in place to ensure fair and equitable participation in state procurement. This not only builds trust in the system but encourages more minority-owned businesses to step forward and contribute to Maryland's economy.

In conclusion, House Bill 856 represents a critical step towards a more inclusive, equitable, and prosperous Maryland. By supporting this bill, we are not only advocating for minority-owned businesses but also for a stronger, more diverse economy that benefits all. I urge all stakeholders to consider the far-reaching impacts of this legislation and therefore request a favorable report.

Thank you,

Therese M. Hessler  
CEO & Founder, Ashlar Government Relations



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## References

Blount, I. Y. (2015). The Impact of Program Strategy on the Success of Public Sector Minority Business Enterprise Set-Aside Programs: The Case of the State of Ohio.

Blount, I. Y. (2020). How Do Large Purchasing Organizations Treat Their Diverse Suppliers? Minority Business Enterprise CEOs' Perception of Corporate Commitment to Supplier Diversity. *Business & Society*, 60(7), 1708–1737. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0007650320939134>

Carrington, B. (2015). Procurement - Minority Business Enterprise Program - Report (SB 849).