



BRANDON M. SCOTT
MAYOR

*Office of Government Relations
88 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401*

SB 0235

January 21, 2025

TO: Members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

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

RE: Senate Bill 235 - Housing and Community Development - Project Restore Program - Establishment

POSITION: Support

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** Senate Bill (SB) 235.

SB 235 would establish the Project Restore Program within the Department of Housing and Community Development and authorize the Department to distribute funds to certain place-based community development organizations and units of local government. The Bill would allow recipients of funds to distribute subgrants to qualified entities and specifies the eligible uses of Program funds.

The Bill is geared towards assisting qualified businesses and organizations as they work to activate vacant commercial spaces by providing financial support to improve the vitality of those corridors. The Project Restore Program is an important component of the vacancy reduction efforts that are currently under way in Baltimore. On December 11, 2023, Mayor Scott announced a historic agreement between BUILD, GBC, & Mayor Scott to address the vacant & abandoned housing crisis in the city at scale, over 15 years. Thriving businesses support healthy neighborhoods and the City and the State must work together to explore every tool to address both residential and commercial vacancy.

The Bill also provides for funds to be used for operating capital, which is critical to supporting start-up businesses by emerging owners. The 2024 Program Restore awardees included 18 organizations based in Baltimore City, totaling over 4 million dollars in awards and investment.

For these reasons, the BCA respectfully request a **favorable** report on SB 235.