



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony in Support of House Bill 541:  
Department of Commerce - Nonprofit Organizations Navigator**

**Health and Government Operations**

**February 18, 2025**

Good afternoon, Madam Chair, Madam Vice-Chair and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee. For the record, I'm Delegate Pam Guzzone representing Howard County's District 13, and I am here in support of House Bill 541 which establishes a nonprofit organizations' navigator position within the Department of Commerce to assist nonprofits in accessing and applying for state grant programs.

Maryland's over 40,000 nonprofit organizations play a pivotal role in supporting our communities by filling gaps in public service and aiding our vulnerable populations in a wide variety of ways. However, many non-profits struggle with the complicated grant application processes; this is especially true of smaller non-profits which often do not have and cannot afford to have a grants specialist. Implementing a navigator is critical step to ensure that these organizations can productively find and access state grant opportunities in a timely manner and without cumbersome and inefficient roadblocks.

This position will strengthen and support Maryland's vital partnership with the nonprofit sector. It will provide a dedicated point of contact and a central starting place for non-profits to access technical assistance in identifying, navigating, accessing and appropriately utilizing grant programs. This navigation assistance will also help resolve procedural and administrative delays in the grant-making process. The navigator would also collect and share information with nonprofits about the federal, State, and local grants available to support their programmatic goals and objectives.

As envisioned, the navigator would represent the needs of nonprofits throughout the State government, in the same way that is already do for small businesses through the Department of Commerce's small business ombudsman program – which provides a single point of contact for small business to help them navigate state-wide opportunities available to them.

As stated, the bill would establish the navigator role within the Department of Commerce, and it would streamline already existing processes and resources to improve efficiency, rather than requiring new state agency expenditures. By streamlining processes and voicing nonprofit needs, a navigator can both help prevent funding inefficiencies and strengthen our nonprofit sector.

Ultimately, by reducing inefficiencies and delays, this bill seeks to save the state money by maximizing the effective, efficient use of grant funding.

Non-profits in Maryland are a critical part of our state's economy and our communities, and with the uncertainty on the federal side, helping to assure the viability of Maryland non-profits is more important than ever. That's why the Senate sponsor– and I – have an amendment to make this an emergency bill and work to have the navigator hired and ready to go at the start of the fiscal year. That does impact the fiscal note, but does not put the note over the \$100,000 mark even in the out years.

This bill is a reasonably small investment by the state to help empower our nonprofit organizations with the tools they need to thrive by ensuring they can access the resources needed to maximize the vital work they do in our communities.

For these reasons and more, I request a favorable report on HB 541.