

Michael Berardi
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Testimony for SB0144

My name is Michael Berardi and I am submitting a favorable testimony in support of SB0144. Cooperatives have been extremely important to me for years, I have been a member-owner of the Catonsville Cooperative Market since February 2019. I have also worked alongside Cooperative Community Development, inc and The Baltimore Roundtable for Economic Democracy (BRED). I have worked to increase education around coops in community and entrepreneurial spaces. I've done this work because I believe in the power of local cooperation and organization. I am also a co-founder of OCA Mocha, a community center and coffee shop in Baltimore County that is partnered with the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC). Just last year we were holding conversations about converting into a cooperative structure, however the lack of clarity and support from the state made it challenging for the team and ultimately those efforts were tabled. Having SB0144 passed would mean more opportunities for folks like us to have clear guidelines and processes for working in cooperative structures. True economic power and community sustainability comes from banding together and supporting our local economy. Cooperatives are a clear structure for achieving this in an equitable and just manner. I am currently one semester away from earning my master's degree in Community Leadership at UMBC and have spent time during my studies exploring the cooperative model and the increasing success of co-ops in Baltimore. Witnessing this growth over the past several years inspires me to continue investing in and supporting co-ops that uplift many of the values we share as Marylanders. Making it easier for people to create worker cooperatives has a clear benefit to the people of Maryland as well as the state institutions. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.