

Dear Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

My name is Autumn Goodwin. This is a favorable testimony for Senate bill SB0144: Corporations and Associations - Limited Worker Cooperative Associations - Authorization (Maryland Limited Cooperative Association Act). I am a business owner and startup founder of the company Vectech, a tech company located in Baltimore Maryland developing AI based technologies for gathering information on insects to support public health and environmental health. I have been working on the research that birthed Vectech since 2017, originally at Johns Hopkins University, and in 2019 my colleagues Tristan Ford, Margaret Glancey, and I co-founded Vectech. Since then, we have benefited greatly from Maryland state funding through the Maryland Innovation Initiative, among other programs offered by the state of Maryland and the federal government. This has allowed our team to grow to a current 23 employees, most of whom are based in Maryland.

We are a highly technical and incredibly collaborative team, enabling our success and growth which has been funded primarily with research and development grants and contracts. As Vectech has grown, it has become clear to me that we are building significant value. Yet given the current limitations in equity structures for corporate entities, this value is unequally distributed among those generating the value: the workers of Vectech. I work with a smart, agile, and highly skilled team. As a startup, we cannot always pay the most competitive salaries, but I hope to offer better compensation in the form of equity. A Limited Worker Cooperative Association would further ensure that the value generated by “my” business is not held in the wealth of a few founders, but shared in abundance with the people who make it a reality.

The Baltimore tech ecosystem is developing towards an inspiring vision of equitable innovation not bound by historically discriminative lines such as race, gender, and economic class. This has been embodied in the work of Upsurge, Baltimore Tracks, the Techstars Equitech accelerator now entering its fourth year, Innovation Works, OpensWorks and the work of many others focused on enabling economic equity in Baltimore. While inspiring, the legal frameworks available to equitably minded founders is currently limited. But by creating a clear pathway for making a worker cooperative, we not only enable collaborative worker-run coffee shops, book stores, breweries and farms, but also further advance the vision of an equitable tech city, creating a vastly more diverse landscape of those who call themselves tech business owners.

I am convinced that worker cooperatives are an essential missing ingredient to creating a vibrant equitable tech ecosystem in Baltimore and the surrounding area. While I would love to convert my business to a limited worker cooperative association in Maryland. The passing of SB0085 would provide a clearer pathway for this conversion, and would at minimum provide a pathway for the formation of a tech focused worker cooperative in my future after I move on from the work of Vectech. For these reasons, I ask you to support this bill.

With hope and sincerity,

Autumn Goodwin

Co-Founder and Chief Technology Officer of Vectech, Inc - a public benefit corporation
Baltimore, MD