

Maryland Commission for Women

51 Monroe Street, Suite. 1034 Rockville, Maryland 20850



www.marylandwomen.org

HB1033 Department of Social and Economic Mobility - Maryland Chamber of Commerce Grant Program - Established (Business Networks Access Act)

SPONSOR: Delegate Sarah Wolek

HEARING: March 3, 2026

POSITION: FAVORABLE

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Chair Valderrama, Vice Chair Charkoudian and Members of the Economic Matters Committee,

The Maryland Commission for Women urges a **FAVORABLE** report on HB1033, the *Business Networks Access Act*. We thank Delegate Wolek for introducing this legislation, which promotes equity and economic opportunity in Maryland's entrepreneurial ecosystem. .

HB1033 fills a critical gap in state support for women and minority business leaders who often lack access to the institutional networks that fuel business growth. The Maryland Commission for Women is committed to advancing economic mobility for women across the state through expanding access to business networking opportunities.

HB1033 establishes the *Maryland Chamber of Commerce Grant Program* within the **Department of Social and Economic Mobility**. The program targets underrepresented communities, including women, Black and Hispanic entrepreneurs, and other minority business owners, by providing grants to subsidize chamber membership fees, funding cross-chamber networking events to promote collaboration and inclusivity , and setting eligibility requirements to ensure the program reaches those most in need. The legislation also allocates \$100,000 in the Governor's annual budget to support these efforts, creating a dedicated funding stream to expand access to critical business networks for underrepresented entrepreneurs.

Despite the growth of women- and minority-owned businesses in Maryland, costs associated with participating in institutional business networks remains a barrier, especially for women, Black, Hispanic, and other underrepresented entrepreneurs. Research shows that these networks are critical for business growth, mentorship, and access to capital, both within a single chamber and across multiple chambers.¹ According to a 2025 UN Women report, equitable participation in business networks and corporate structures not only supports individual business

¹Linton, Top States for Minority-Owned Businesses.

success but also contributes to broader economic growth and gender equality globally². Without equitable access, underrepresented business owners face systemic barriers to scaling their businesses, participating in cross chamber collaborations, and connecting with key stakeholders who can accelerate their success.

Expanding access to business networks strengthens Maryland's economy by promoting diversity, inclusion, economic mobility, and innovation across all chambers of commerce. By supporting women, particularly women of color, and other underrepresented business owners, HB1033 helps entrepreneurs build critical connections, access resources, and thrive in a competitive marketplace.

For all of these reasons, the Maryland Commission for Women urges a FAVORABLE report. For specific questions, please contact our Executive Director, Ariana Kelly, at Ariana.Kelly@Maryland.Gov or via telephone at 240-338-0591.

² Unfinished Business: Private Sector and Gender Equality – Transforming Corporate Commitments into Equality for All Women and Girls, UN Women, September 2025.
<https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2025-09/unfinished-business-private-sector-and-gender-equality-en.pdf>