

Andy Ellis  
Seeking the Green Party nomination for Governor  
HB 188  
FWA

I support HB0188. I want to tell the Committee briefly why this bill matters to me personally, and to put an idea on the table.

In June 2025, I was laid off after 15 years at the same company. I started on the call center floor and worked my way up to business intelligence lead. Then my employer outsourced my position overseas. They still needed the work done. They just didn't want to pay an American worker to do it.

I am now navigating Maryland's unemployment insurance system firsthand. I am also launching a consulting firm with two former colleagues who were displaced from the same company. We have the skills, the experience, and the clients. What we do not have is a safety net that supports what we are building.

Here is the problem: Maryland's UI system punishes entrepreneurship. If I land a client, my benefits shrink. If I make a sale, they shrink again. I am still required to apply for traditional jobs even if I am spending 40 hours a week building a viable business. The system was designed for an economy where you got laid off and found the same job somewhere else. That economy is disappearing.

There is a proven alternative. Oregon has operated a Self-Employment Assistance program since 1995. It waives the job search requirement, lets participants keep their business income, and partners with Small Business Development Centers for support. It costs the state almost nothing. Participants receive the same benefits they would have received anyway. Over 1,500 businesses have launched through the program. Seventy-seven percent are still operating. Nearly half hired additional employees.

Maryland actually passed SEA legislation in 1995. It was never implemented, and the statute has since been abrogated. The authority no longer exists. A bill like HB0188, which is already modernizing the UI system, is the natural vehicle to restore it.

I wrote about this in a published essay, "Let Laid-Off Marylanders Build Businesses, Not Just Hunt for Jobs," published February 8, 2026. I ask that it be entered into the hearing record. It includes the Oregon data and a specific policy proposal for Maryland.

My amendment request: add Self-Employment Assistance provisions to HB0188. Let displaced workers use their existing UI benefits to build a business. Waive the job search requirement, stop penalizing early business income, and partner with Maryland's SBDC network for support. The details are in the essay.

I encourage this committee to provide a favorable with amendments report on HB0188.