



Testimony in Support of House Bill 147 - Nonprofit Organizations Navigator, Termination Provision Repeal

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Submitted by Courtney Hall, CEO

Interfaith Works provides vital services and a pathway to greater stability to 35,000 County residents each year in Montgomery County. We offer access to essential needs such as food, clothing, emergency financial assistance, shelter and housing, and job placement support.

I first learned about the proposal to create a Nonprofit Organizations Navigator from Senator Cheryl Kagan, who raised it after hearing from nonprofits struggling to navigate a wide range of state processes. For many organizations, figuring out how to move something forward within state government can be time-consuming and frustrating, especially without clear guidance on who to contact or how agencies connect to one another. Furthermore, finding information about state grant opportunities has been unnecessarily difficult and time-consuming for nonprofits. Too often, access to this information has depended on relationships rather than transparency, which can place smaller or less-connected organizations at a disadvantage.

I want to thank those who supported and passed this legislation, because it is already doing what it was intended to do. I had the opportunity to meet with Jessica Doiron, Maryland's new Nonprofit Navigator, and our conversation focused on very practical challenges nonprofits face, like finding state grant opportunities. Jessica was keenly aware of these problems and had developed an effective approach to getting nonprofits the help they need, including providing technical assistance with state grant applications, providing targeted multi-level grant searches, and resolving awarded state grant delays and difficulties. The monthly Maryland Nonprofit Navigator Newsletter Jessica developed is a rich source of information on federal, state, local, and private grant funds, as well as training opportunities. The most recent newsletter announced the much-welcomed State Search Compass which will further help nonprofits find grants.

In another instance, a colleague of mine spoke with Jessica and shared how our team had been stuck for months trying to complete a legislative bond application with the Maryland Department of General Services. Jessica met with our team, reviewed where the process had stalled, and within 24 hours connected us with the appropriate person at DGS. Two business days later, our grant award letters were released. What had gone nowhere for months was resolved in less than a week.

These experiences reflect what this role was designed to provide.

The Nonprofit Navigator was designed to understand how nonprofits operate and how state agencies function, and to be responsive when something is not moving and help Maryland nonprofits find grant funding. House Bill 147 would allow this position to remain in place without the uncertainty created by a sunset clause, giving Maryland nonprofits a sustained resource for securing the funding necessary to serve your constituents.

I urge favorable action.