



HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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February 13, 2026

Delegate Jheanelle K. Wilkins, Chair
Ways and Means Committee
130 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT of House Bill HB898: Economic Development - Delivering Economic Competitiveness and Advancing Development Efforts (DECADE) Act of 2026**

Dear Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark, and Members of the Committee:

Maryland's long-term economic success depends on our ability to compete nationally and globally for business investment, talent, and innovation. The DECADE Act provides a strategic, forward-looking framework to strengthen that competitiveness by modernizing economic development tools and better aligning state and local efforts.

For counties across Maryland, particularly diversified economies like Howard County, this legislation enhances our ability to attract corporate expansions and relocations, invest in innovation-driven infrastructure, support workforce training, and advance public-private partnerships that create high-wage jobs. These tools are essential to sustaining momentum in a rapidly changing economic landscape.

Howard County's recent successes demonstrate what is possible when local strategy is paired with effective state programs.

We recently welcomed IronCircle, an AI-powered cybersecurity workforce platform, which relocated from Florida to Columbia, Maryland. Drawn by our deep tech talent and innovation ecosystem, IronCircle is bringing more than 200 jobs to Howard County. Its new 12,000-square-foot facility in Downtown Columbia will address critical cybersecurity workforce gaps. IronCircle joins Tenable and other technology leaders as part of our place-based downtown innovation strategy.

Howard County has also seen strong results from international business development efforts. After leading two trade missions to Europe and Canada, we have attracted nine international companies, including Sreehith Consulting from the United Kingdom and TechRyde from Canada, both AI firms that chose Howard County because of our robust technology ecosystem. These partnerships are creating long-term pipelines for innovation, trade, and workforce collaboration that will benefit Maryland for generations.

We are also seeing meaningful progress in our Gateway Innovation District. By strategically packaging local and state incentives, we have built a strong pipeline of companies seeking to expand into the district. Through coordinated engagement with businesses, property owners, and partners, Gateway is emerging as a future platform for innovation and growth. In total, this Innovation District is projected to generate 5,000–8,000 new jobs, 1 million square feet of new commercial and



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innovation/flex office space, and more than 300,000 square feet of new retail and restaurant development.

The Job Creation Tax Credit has been instrumental in this work, supporting expansions that helped one long-standing food distribution company retain 260 jobs while creating an additional 230 positions.

The DECADE Act builds on these successes by preserving and strengthening critical incentive programs relied upon by local jurisdictions:

- It extends and enhances the Job Creation Tax Credit and Research and Development Tax Credit, providing greater certainty for employers while improving program effectiveness.
- It modernizes key tools to increase flexibility when competing for major investments, strengthens the Build Our Future Grant Program, revitalizes the RISE Zone program, and expands support for cybersecurity and technology firms.
- It also boosts Maryland's creative economy by eliminating the per-production cap on the Film Production Activity Tax Credit.

Maryland is competing in a global environment where states are aggressively investing in advanced industries and aligning economic development with workforce, infrastructure, and quality-of-place strategies. HB898 delivers the vision and tools needed to grow jobs, broaden opportunity, and sustain prosperity over the next decade and beyond.

Howard County's experience shows that when state and local efforts are aligned, companies choose Maryland, jobs are created, and communities thrive. The DECADE Act ensures we can continue that progress.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on HB898.
Respectfully,

Calvin Ball
Howard County Executive