



POSITION STATEMENT

TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL 774 – OFFICE OF THE BUSINESS OMBUDSMAN – STATE CUSTOMER SERVICE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS TRAINING PROGRAM

**DONALD C. FRY
PRESIDENT & CEO
GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE**

POSITION: Support

The Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) is a non-partisan, independent, regional business advocacy organization comprised of hundreds of businesses -- large, medium and small -- educational institutions, nonprofit organizations and foundations located in Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Harford, and Howard counties as well as Baltimore City. The GBC is a 60-year-old, private-sector membership organization with a rich legacy of working with government to find solutions to problems that negatively affect our competitiveness and viability. It is an organization that prides itself on advocating for changes in public policies that strengthen the business climate while improving the quality of life in the region.

The Greater Baltimore Committee supports Senate Bill 774 – Office of the Business Ombudsman – State Customer Service and Business Development Efforts – Training Program.

In 2009, the Greater Baltimore Committee conducted a 12 month study of the state’s business climate through review of published surveys, conversations with top current and former economic development professionals, focus groups, feedback sessions, and meetings with business leaders. The result of this study was a report entitled, “Gaining the Competitive Edge”, in which the GBC outlined eight core pillars for economic growth and job creation. These pillars were meant to provide some insight for state government and legislators as to what types of policies needed to be in place in order to best foster economic growth.

The first pillar outlined the importance for government leadership that unites with business as a partner. Primarily this pillar speaks to the importance of government setting a “top-down” tone that business, especially as it relates to state agency interaction with the business community. The report references feedback that local economic development professionals receive from business owners about the poor quality of their interactions with state government. These business owners speak of a state government that displays little sense of urgency when attending to their needs and agencies full of long and bureaucratic processes. Anecdotes of this nature comprise much of why Maryland has such a negative reputation with regards to business friendliness.

Senate Bill 774 seeks to create a program by which state employees with the most interaction with the business community would learn best practices for how to interact with their customers. Employees from a variety of state agencies that deal regularly with the business community would be required to undergo this program, which would be administered by the Office of the State Ombudsmen.

This program is a great way to ensure that when business owners reach out to their state government for assistance, they are greeted by an employee who is willing and able to assist them. Since for many members of the business community their only interactions are with these state agency employees, it is of the utmost importance that these interactions are positive if Maryland is going to successfully set a welcoming tone.

For the reasons stated above, the Greater Baltimore Committee urges a favorable report of Senate Bill 774.

GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE

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