



east baltimore development inc.

Community. Business. Opportunity.

March 3, 2021

Senator Paul G. Pinsky, Chair
Senator Cheryl C. Kagan, Vice Chair
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
2 West, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Written Testimony Supporting Senate Bill 763 (Alcoholic Beverages – Class A Licenses – Retail Grocery Establishments (Healthy Food Accountability Act of 2021))

Dear Senators Pinsky, Kagan and members of the Committee:

On behalf of East Baltimore Development, Inc. (EBDI), I welcome the opportunity to submit to the record written testimony in support of Senate Bill 763 (SB 763). SB 763 would allow for exceptions to the prohibitions surrounding retail alcoholic beverages licenses and would in turn require annual fees to be distributed to the Community Legacy Financial Assistance Fund (“Fund”). This Fund provides local governments and community development organizations with funding for essential projects aimed at strengthening communities. In addition, the bill requires that licenses be authorized only for use in conjunction with, or on the premises of, a retail establishment that offers fresh, healthy foods to its customers. As a result, the enactment of SB 763 would provide another avenue for Maryland businesses to contribute to the economy and would help to address key issues related to food insecurity. EBDI enthusiastically supports any efforts to bolster community development efforts within Baltimore City and SB 763 presents a unique opportunity to do so.

EBDI, which operates within Maryland Legislative District 45, was established in 2003 by community, government, institutional and philanthropic partners to stabilize and revitalize an 88-acre community in East Baltimore. East Baltimore has consistently experienced some of the worst outcomes in Baltimore’s basic quality of life indicators, such as employment, health, educational achievement, adequate housing, and crime and safety. At EBDI, our charge is to execute an ambitious plan to transform the neighborhood into a healthier, thriving community, now called Eager Park. Since redevelopment began, Eager Park now includes over 400 completed mixed-income homeownership and rental housing units; over one million square feet of new commercial office, lab, and retail space; a hotel; a community learning campus with an early childhood center and a public K-8 school; and a new 5-acre park. When completed, the project will include 1,600 total units of housing and additional retail, life sciences, research and office space.

Despite the overwhelming success EBDI has had in redeveloping Eager Park, there is still plenty of opportunity for economic growth and expansion in and around our neighborhood. Increased financial support toward the Fund would complement our community development efforts in the areas of business attraction/retention/expansion, job creation and increasing homeownership, all of which are crucial to the success of our revitalization initiative. In our project area, we continually strive to increase homeownership opportunities (particularly for residents who have been relocated and otherwise impacted during the project); have developed a multi-pronged retail strategy; and have established a Community Reinvestment Fund to support local businesses and workforce development. However, we have found that limited access to financing has become a barrier for many businesses and residents to participate in these programs.

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In addition, EBDI, in partnership with the Baltimore Development Corp., is working to attract a grocer to Eager Park or an adjacent East Baltimore community. According to the latest market study EBDI procured in June 2020, securing a permanent grocery store within the project area unfortunately is years ahead. In the meantime, the residents of Eager Park and its surrounding neighborhoods continue to struggle to access fresh food options in and near their communities. To make matters worse, in September 2020, one of the last grocery stores within the vicinity of the project area closed its doors. The lack of a grocery store has negatively impacted Eager Park and East Baltimore residents, many of whom have limited or no access to transportation to travel to other grocery stores. This bill would incentivize grocers to locate in disinvested communities, like East Baltimore, and address the food insecurity residents are facing each day.

For these reasons, we are eager to support SB 763, which not only would support community development efforts via the Community Legacy Financial Assistance Fund, but also would require that qualifying businesses provide access to healthy food to neighborhoods like those found in East Baltimore.

I hope that you will issue a favorable report of SB 763. Thank you for the opportunity to share my written testimony in support.

Sincerely,



Cheryl Washington
President & CEO