

**Testimony Presented to the House Ways and Means Committee  
SB577 – Makerspace Initiative Pilot Program  
Feb. 23, 2021**

Open Works is a nonprofit makerspace located in central Baltimore with a mission to make tools, technology, and the knowledge to use them accessible to all.

Open Works has quickly grown into a national leader in the maker movement, setting new precedents on the ability for makerspaces to deliver economic impact; diversifying a field that has been historically unrepresentative of minorities and women; and delivering high-quality educational programming in fabrication, design, and entrepreneurship to learners of all ages. In a field without widely documented best practices, Open Works has developed a valuable set of operational competencies that can help other municipalities in Maryland derive similar economic and educational benefits from makerspaces.

Additionally, in March 2020, Open Works stood up an emergency manufacturing project to combat the emerging Covid-19 pandemic. This project, called Makers Unite, eventually harnessed the power of 388 volunteers across the state who 3D printed parts for face shields at home and shipped them to Open Works for assembly, sanitizing, packing, and distribution. Over 56 days of manufacturing, Makers Unite produced 28,270 units of PPE at a time when normal supply chains were overwhelmed, going to clients such as the University of Maryland Medical Systems, the ATF, the Amtrak Police, and the USDA. We have reactivated this emergency manufacturing capacity just recently, making desks for low-income at-home learners. This emergency manufacturing capacity, powered by advanced digital design and fabrication equipment, is critical to preparing Maryland for the next disaster, whatever it may be. Establishing more makerspaces around the state will allow for the rapid spin-up of production to meet local needs.

The proposed legislation creates a non-lapsing fund to be administered by TEDCO that would support the dissemination of Open Works' best practices to other makerspaces and municipalities establishing makerspaces in the State of Maryland. This will help other new organizations increase their ability to deliver high-quality services to communities in need, quickly scale their audience, and produce sustainable, grassroots economic growth. Further, this bill will help ensure the financial viability of public-facing makerspaces in Maryland by providing operational support that can be leveraged for greater growth, productivity, and private fundraising.

For these reasons, Open Works encourages a favorable vote on SB577.