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February 25, 2026

The Honorable Kriselda Valderrama, Chair  
Economic Matters  
230 Taylor House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

**HB1033 - Department of Social and Economic Mobility - Maryland Chamber of Commerce Grant Program - Established (Business Networks Access Act)**

Dear Chairwoman Valderrama and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Allegany County Chamber of Commerce and the rural business community we serve, I write in strong support of House Bill 1033, the Business Networks Access Act.

Allegany County is a rural community with roughly 75% of our Chamber membership made up of small or micro-businesses. These entrepreneurs operate on thin margins, often without dedicated administrative staff, marketing budgets, or access to broader professional networks. For many, Chamber membership provides connection to training, advocacy, visibility, and peer support.

However, even modest membership dues can present a barrier for underrepresented and emerging business owners in rural areas. Our region represents a large number of minority-owned and underserved businesses that are largely not engaged in Chamber membership. In our experience, cost is one of the primary barriers to entry.

HB 1033 would provide meaningful support by allowing chambers to subsidize memberships for underrepresented entrepreneurs and facilitate broader networking across regions. In a rural setting, these connections are transformative. They open doors to procurement opportunities, mentorship, partnerships, and visibility that small business owners would not otherwise access.

Additionally, support for collaboration strengthens rural chambers that operate with lean staffing and limited resources. Shared events and regional partnerships allow us to extend opportunity beyond county lines while maximizing efficiency — something especially important in smaller communities where capacity is limited.

This bill recognizes that economic mobility in Maryland must include rural communities. Investing in access to business networks is a practical, scalable way to strengthen local economies, support job creators, and foster inclusive growth statewide.

For these reasons, the Allegany County Chamber of Commerce respectfully urges a favorable report on House Bill 1033.

Thank you for your consideration and your continued commitment to Maryland's small business community.

Sincerely,

Juli McCoy  
President & CEO  
Allegany County Chamber of Commerce