



OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
500 N. Calvert Street, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Baltimore, MD 21202

The Honorable Larry Hogan  
Governor  
State House  
100 State Circle  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

The Honorable Boyd K. Rutherford Lieutenant  
Governor  
State House  
100 State Circle  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

The Honorable Bill Ferguson President  
Senate of Maryland  
State House, H-107  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

The Honorable Adrienne Jones Speaker Maryland  
House of Delegates State House, H-107  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: MSAR #11434 - 2020 Annual Report Office of Small Business Regulatory Assistance (01.01.2018.04)

Dear Governor Hogan, Lieutenant Governor Rutherford, President Ferguson, and Jones:

Business Regulation Article Section 2-103.1 of the Annotated Code of Maryland requires the Office of Small Business Regulatory Assistance to annually report to the legislature on the performance and activities of the office.

The Maryland Department of Labor and the Office of Small Business Regulatory Assistance (OSBRA) are pleased to present OSBRA's Annual report. Since its inception in January 2018, OSBRA has quickly gained momentum by conducting outreach and assisting the business community. Moreover, OSBRA has developed communication tools and outreach strategies with the express goal of establishing partnerships to achieve results.

In 2020, OSBRA has continued to develop internal mechanisms and processes to facilitate assistance to small businesses, employees, and constituents. OSBRA now successfully manages inquiries, concerns, and compliance matters for Maryland's business community. Thank you for the opportunity to assist and serve Maryland's business community. We are honored to have this opportunity to work towards improving Maryland's business climate.

Sincerely,  
Tiffany Robinson  
Secretary

LARRY HOGAN, GOVERNOR | BOYD K. RUTHERFORD, LT. GOVERNOR | TIFFANY P. ROBINSON, SECRETARY

# **The Office of Small Business Regulatory Assistance**

## **Annual Report**

### **Fiscal Year 2020**

#### **Background and Mission**

The Office of Small Business Regulatory Assistance (OSBRA), created in 2018 through Governor Hogan's Executive Order Number 01.01.2018.04, was established to assist the Department of Labor in disseminating information through outreach and assisting small businesses with implementation of Maryland Healthy Working Families Act and other regulations affecting Maryland small business owners and entrepreneurs. The Unit's charter also includes functions to: facilitate responsiveness of state government to small business needs, serve as a central clearinghouse of information for business assistance programs, and services available in the state. OSBRA also encompassed the ombudsman role that entails coordinating and collaborating with other state agencies to assist in resolving state regulatory issues for business owners.

The Office serves as a point of contact and liaison for small businesses between state and local agencies interfacing with for-profit and nonprofit organizations, chambers of commerce, industry related professional, and civic associations focused on small businesses.

Our efforts are achieved through active outreach to our customers and in-reach to our colleagues through electronic mail, telephone, chats, social media channels, webinars, direct meetings, partnerships, presentations, speaking engagements, networking, and event participation.

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**Regulatory Assistance**

The team provides small business owners and entrepreneurs with information and business resources serving as a conduit to also assist them in navigating local and state regulatory processes and navigation within those agencies. This function has enabled our unit to regularly interact internally with other Labor units and collaborate externally with other state agencies.

The office normally helps customers with regulatory issues in regards to licensing, permitting, and regulatory compliance. Due to the COVID -19 pandemic the requests to our office changed.

Our clients needed to know which businesses were allowed to stay open and what grants and loans were available from the state to help them. The details are in the COVID 19 section of this report.

## **Customer Service**

OSBRA works in tandem with the Governor’s Office of Improvement and Performance (GOPI), Director Allison Cordell, and with the Governor’s Office of Executive Services, **Director Gaye Adams** to oversee the statewide Customer Service Initiative. OSBRA is instrumental in the implementation of agency training sessions, annual reporting, and selection and award processing for the Governor's Heroes Awards. OSBRA developed a Standard Operating Procedure to streamline the process and establish consistency for the award selection; the annual statewide Governor’s Customer Service Report provides a highlighted compilation of agency reports acknowledging performance and processes implemented for improving customer service experiences throughout the State.

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OSBRA co-hosted two training sessions for agency liaisons designed to provide information and exchange of ideas for “moving the needle” in improving customer experiences for both internal and external customer service within their respective agencies. The customer service surveys primarily serve as the measure of service obtained from customer feedback. OSBRA expressed the need for agencies to encourage feedback from all customers via the survey or other creative ways to gather customer input.

This year presented a unique challenge with COVID-19. One area we saw great improvement across state agencies was utilizing technology to better assist clients. An example would be the Department of Labor creating educational videos to show people how to file for unemployment benefits. Rather than traditionally reading long documents, customers could watch a short, quick and easy to follow video to show them how to apply for benefits. In addition, many other departments made their services and information available online. Those are just some of the many ways the state is improving customer service. Here’s a link to the statewide annual report for [customer service](#) with more information.

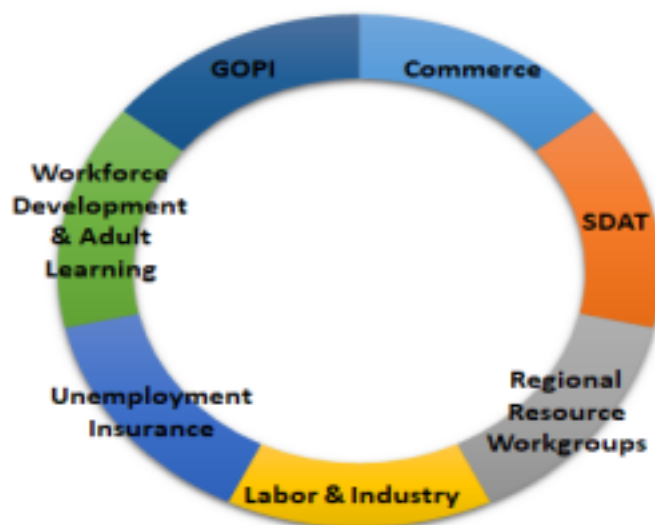
## **TYPES OF CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS**

- Agency Non-Responsive
- Employment Training ●
- Forms/Documents ● Lack of Information ● Licensing Exams
- Licensing Renewals ●
- MBE/WBE/DBE/Veteran ●
- Misinformation
- Permits & Licenses
- Personnel
- Processing
- Procurement
- Registration
- Regulatory
- Regulatory Compliance
- Technical Difficulties ●
- Telephone
- Unemployment Insurance - Employee
- Unemployment Insurance - Employer
- Unable to Contact Agency
- Website

## Special Projects

The OSBRA staff possess an impressive amount of talent and experience based on the aggregate of individual backgrounds. The team has vast, seasoned knowledge and skill working with the small business community. The team has easily transferred and shared those talents in assisting other agencies and organizations. OSBRA's team has provided additional opportunities for the team to assist, partner, and collaborate with colleagues and customers internally, as well as co-working externally with state agencies to accomplish special projects assisting constituents, small businesses, and entrepreneurs.

### Collaboration & Special Projects Partners



Each special project has its own unique set of actions, functions and tasks required in order to provide optimal outcomes regarding collaboration.

## Cyber Security Incident

The Maryland Department of Labor experienced a cyber security incident and initiated an

investigation and determined that files stored on the Literacy Works Information System and a legacy unemployment insurance service database were subject to possible unauthorized access through the Internet. While some personally identifiable information may have been accessed without authorization, a thorough investigation conducted by the Department has not revealed any misuse of the accessed data. When the investigation was complete, the Department of Labor contacted the customers who were impacted by the incident and encouraged them to carefully monitor their accounts. Those who have been affected will be offered two years of free credit monitoring through an independent service. The Office of Small Business Regulatory Assistance

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was responsible for answering questions from the people who were affected. The Office set up a dedicated phone and email to answer questions. There were 400 inquiries to the office and we were able to enroll 1887 people in the credit monitor program. The details of the report can be found [here](#).

### **Unemployment Insurance**

The Governor's office received numerous voicemails and needed assistance. OSBRA had two team members review and transcript these calls so they could be reviewed and directed to the appropriate place.

The Department of Labor has experienced an overwhelming amount of fraudulent claims through unemployment insurance. These fake claims slow down the process for legitimate claims to be filled. OSBRA dedicated two team members who worked to review and determine if claims were fraudulent.

### **COVID-19**

The damage from COVID-19 virus was historic, unprecedented, and presented many challenges to the business community. OSBRA worked with the business community to answer questions and helped them through the difficult process.

Our office answered questions about capacity limits, which businesses were essential, and how to access grant and loan programs from the Department of Commerce. Team members monitored a dedicated email inbox to receive questions related to the Department of Labor.

At the request from the Governor's Office, the team was the liaison for all 157 cities and towns for COVID-19 questions. They would host weekly conference calls with cabinet secretaries ranging from Health, Labor, Education, Commerce, and others. The purpose of this group was to make sure that local governments had all the information and resources they needed to help combat COVID-19.

### **Special Projects:**

- Serving as members on the Maryland Department of Commerce Subcabinet Small Business Workgroup
- Participating on Statewide Regional Resources Workgroups
- Collaborating with sister state agencies and local partners to enhance economic development for Maryland's business community and constituents
- Reviewing and preparing fiscal notes related to small business

## **Focus Moving Forward**

OSBRA initially focused the majority of team efforts around the then new Maryland Healthy Working Families Act, or Sick and Safe Leave Law. OSBRA's primary function revolved around disseminating information to business owners regarding the new legislation and compliance. A

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great deal of time and manpower was exerted and focused on business owners, employees, and constituent inquiries through dedicated email, telephone lines, and educational outreach activities. The increased awareness of Sick and Safe Leave has compelled OSBRA to revisit the Executive Order and redirect the Office's primary focus and strategy towards targeted statewide and local assistance for the business community to:

- Facilitate responsiveness of State government to business needs;
- Serve as a clearinghouse of information for business assistance programs and services available in the State;
- Assist by referring businesses and individuals to resources that provide business services or assistance requested;
- Identify and assist with resolving problems encountered by businesses with State agencies, regional, and local economic development organizations - public, private, and nonprofits;
- Coordinate programs and services implemented by state and local agencies.

In FY21 OSBRA intends to establish and maintain metrics in order to monitor the Unit's progress. OSBRA plans to improve methodologies, create mechanisms, and build metrics that can be replicated statewide. OSBRA will continue to convey sick and safe leave information to small businesses. OSBRA will broaden its reach through statewide and local outreach to assist the business community, in addition to expanding the office's current scope and function. OSBRA intends to create synergy becoming the statewide "connector" for Maryland's business community.

OSBRA will begin to establish a model outreach strategy for small business advocacy, best practices, and education. The Office will communicate challenges, barriers, and ideas expressed by the business community to state government policymakers and leaders that affect laws and regulations regarding business.

OSBRA's primary operational shift will centralize and navigate business resources for constituents and Maryland's small business community in collaboration with state agencies, local economic development agencies, private and non-profit organizations, business resource stakeholders, and providers. This shift simultaneously enhances customer service experiences internally and externally across state agencies. OSBRA's efforts will provide the components for developing a strategic plan. The plan will serve as the guide for ensuring Maryland's businesses are prepared to respond to new laws; well-informed with qualified information allowing them to take advantage of beneficial resources, programs, and incentives necessary to start, sustain, and grow their businesses.

## **Conclusion**

The Office of Small Business Regulatory Assistance is constantly looking for ways to improve our engagement and broaden our outreach to our customers and partners. OSBRA is committed to assisting Maryland's diverse business community. In FY21 the Office looks to attain new goals that directly coincide with the Department of Labor's mission. We will be proactive in

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reaching out to business chambers and economic development groups to let them know we can assist their businesses. We will continue to focus on Maryland's small business community exceeding customer expectations and customer experiences consistent with Governor Hogan's mission of "Changing Maryland for the Better" because we are "Open for Business."

**Contact Information**

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