

MSAR # 11434 - 2021 Annual Report Office of Small Business Regulatory Assistance (01.01.2018.04)

July 1, 2022

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 A. Jones, Speaker
Maryland House of Delegates
State House, H-107
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

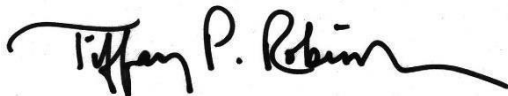
Dear Governor Hogan, Lieutenant Governor Rutherford, President Ferguson, and Speaker Jones:

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

The Maryland Department of Labor and 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 2021, OSBRA continued to develop internal mechanisms and processes to facilitate assistance to small businesses, employees, and constituents. OSBRA 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.

Best Regards,



Tiffany P. Robinson
Secretary
Maryland Department of Labor

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 small businesses with the implementation of the Maryland Healthy Working Families Act and other laws and regulations impacting the small business community.

The Unit's Executive Order 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; and
- Provide ombudsman services to 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.

The OSBRA team consists of seasoned and knowledgeable professionals with vast experiences in all major functional areas of small business. Each team member is committed to working diligently with the small business community to connect them with resources to grow and thrive in Maryland.

Our efforts are achieved through active outreach to our customers and in-reach to our colleagues through electronic mail, phone, social media channels, webinars, direct meetings, partnerships, presentations, speaking engagements, networking, and event participation. We have participated in 4 outreach events and plan to do more in the upcoming year.

Regulatory and COVID-19 Assistance

Regulatory Assistance

OSBRA provides assistance to small businesses, resolves problems encountered while interacting with State agencies, and quickly addresses questions and concerns related to compliance and implementation of laws and regulations. Typically, the office researches and provides solutions to customers with regulatory issues such as starting a business, licensing, permitting, and compliance. However, during the COVID-19 Pandemic, the requests from businesses to OSBRA shifted to include: business closures, grants, loans, workforce, and unemployment insurance (UI).

COVID-19 Assistance

The COVID-19 Pandemic was historic and presented scores of economic disruptions to the business community. To meet these ongoing challenges, OSBRA quickly mobilized and trained staff to respond to UI inquiries — dedicating two staff members to serve on the UI fraud team, researching and updating Maryland businesses on federal, state, and county grants and loans; and working with business owners one-on-one to resolve certificates of good standing at the State Department of Assessments and Taxation.

OSBRA's regulatory activities include:

- Serving as the COVID-19 liaison for all 157 cities and towns in the state of Maryland.
- Hosting 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.
- Assisting a non-profit entity with grant funding associated with Preservation Maryland and the Historical Trust Grant Funding.
- Our team assisted 337 businesses
- Assisting an out-of-state legal services company in connecting to the staff at the Maryland Department of Assessments and Taxation(SDAT) to completely convert and register as a Maryland business.
- Researching a license flag problem for a Hispanic-owned restaurant business and supplying information to obtain a prompt resolution from the Maryland Department of Labor/Unemployment.
- Providing information and guidance to the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange to fulfill a request to identify a list of fifty small businesses in Maryland.

Customer Service

OSBRA works in collaboration with the Governor’s Office of Improvement and Performance (GOPI), and with the Governor’s Office of Executive Services to oversee the statewide Customer Service Initiative. OSBRA is responsible for the administration and oversight of the Customer Service Workgroup which includes representatives from the Governor’s staff and liaisons from each State agency.

OSBRA continues to be instrumental in the implementation of agency training sessions, annual reporting, award selection, and processing for the Governor’s Heroes Awards. In 2021, OSBRA developed the Awards and Recognition Standard Operating Procedure in an effort to streamline the current process and establish consistency in the awardee selection.

Annually, OSBRA is part of the team that provides assistance in developing the Governor’s Customer Service Report. This report provides a highlighted compilation of agency reports acknowledging performance and processes implemented for improving customer service experiences throughout the State.

Future Plans

OSBRA initially focused the majority of team efforts on assisting businesses in interpreting, analyzing, and complying with the Maryland Healthy Working Families Act (MWFA) or Sick and Safe Leave Law. A great deal of time and manpower was exerted and focused on business owners, employees, and constituent inquiries through dedicated email, phone, 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 partners that provide business services or assistance;
- Identify and assist with resolving problems encountered by businesses with State agencies, regional, and local economic development organizations - public, private, and nonprofits; and
- Coordinate programs and services implemented by state and local agencies.

In FY22 OSBRA intends to maintain and improve 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 in conjunction with the Department of Commerce 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 FY22 the Office looks to attain new goals that directly coincide with the Department of Labor's mission. We will be proactive in reaching out to business chambers and economic development groups to let them know we can assist their businesses. We will also be reaching out to other business organizations to help promote our office and help more small businesses thrive in our State. 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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