



Governor's Economic Competitiveness Subcabinet

The mission of the subcabinet is to advise the Governor on, and identify and recommend policies, regulations, strategies, and actions that strengthen Maryland's economic competitiveness and growth on an ongoing basis; review proposed policies and procedures by executive departments and agencies impacting economic development and workforce development; coordinate the implementation of executive directives and legislation that support business and talent development in the state; track the progress of the cross-agency implementation of the Economic Strategic Plan approved by the Maryland Economic Development Commission; track the progress of the cross-agency implementation of the economic goals under the Moore-Miller Administration's Maryland State Plan; and on a biannual basis, develop and publish a consolidated economic competitiveness plan that incorporates strategies and action plans from every executive department and agency represented on the Subcabinet.

Members

Agriculture (AG)	Secretary Kevin Atticks (Steve Connelly & Martin Proulx)
Budget and Management (DBM)	Secretary Jake Weissmann (Richard Auxier)
Commerce	Secretary Harry Coker, Chair (Judy L. Smith)
Education	State Superintendent of Schools Carey Wright (Phil Lasser & Alex Reese)
Maryland Energy Administration (MEA)	Director Kelly Speakes-Backman (Jenn Aiosa)
Environment (MDE)	Secretary Serena McIlwain (Scott Goldman)
General Services	Secretary Atif Chaudhry (Daniel Chase)
Department of Social and Economic Mobility (DoSEM)	Secretary Walter Simmons
Higher Education Commission (MHEC)	Secretary Sanjay Rai
Housing & Community Development (DHCD)	Secretary Jake Day (Brad Fallon)
Labor	Secretary Portia Wu (Ashley Sharp)
Maryland Clean Energy Center	Executive Director Katherine Magruder (Mary Sirios & Pamela Powers)
Maryland Economic Development Corporation	Executive Director Tom Sadowski
Maryland Technology Development Corporation	CEO Troy LeMaile-Stovall
Natural Resources (DNR)	Secretary Josh Kurtz (David Goshorn)
Planning (MDP)	Secretary Rebecca Flora (Darius White)
State (SoS)	Secretary Susan Lee (Alexandria Liu & Michael Lore)
Transportation	Secretary Kathryn Thomson (Joe McAndrew & David Zaidan)
University System of Maryland (USM)	Chancellor Dr. Jay Perman (Diane Walters)

February 23, 2026
401 E. Pratt Street, Baltimore, MD 21202
1:00 – 3:00pm
Minutes

Attendance

Note: Names in parentheses denote designees or alternates for members of the Subcabinet.

Subcabinet:

- Harry Coker, Chair, Commerce
- Kevin Atticks, Agriculture
- Atif Chaudhry, DGS
- Jake Day (Brad Fallon), DHCD
- Rebecca Flora, Planning
- Josh Kurtz, DNR
- Katherine Magruder, MCEC
- Serena McIlwain (Scott Goldman), MDE
- Sanjay Rai, MHEC
- Jay Perman, USM
- Tom Sadowski, MEDCO
- Walter Simmons, DoSEM
- Kelly Speakes-Backman, MEA
- Jake Weissmann (Richard Auxier), DBM
- Carey Wright (Phil Lasser), Education
- Portia Wu, Labor

Guests:

- Eric Anderson
- Logan Dean
- Eduardo Hayden
- Michael Huber
- Karen King-Sheridan
- Secretary Susan Lee
- Alexandria Liu
- Michael Lore
- Tiffany Majors
- Michelle Masucci
- Melanie Pursel
- Ashley Sharp
- Laurel Turlington
- Darius White
- Director Robert Yeager

Commerce:

- Ricardo Benn
- Afiya Bey
- Mindie Burgoyne

- Cori Duggins
- John Gilstrap
- Mary Hanley
- Mayank Kapur
- Jayson Knott
- Tamar Osterman
- Stephen Rice
- Sarah Sheppard
- Judy L. Smith

I. Meeting Called to Order

The meeting was called to order at 1:01 p.m. by Secretary Coker following a quorum confirmation.

II. January 26, 2026 Meeting Minutes Approval

Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the meeting minutes from January 26, 2026 were approved.

III. Action Item Review and Status

Ms. Afiya Bey reviewed the status of action items from the January 26, 2026 meeting.

IV. Discussion – Chair’s Report

Secretary Coker reported on the following topics:

- Commerce is currently gathering data for its Single Sign-on initiative. A session is scheduled within the next few weeks to review the Single Sign-on background and approach collaboratively.
- Commerce was tasked with assessing the organizational construct of Maryland’s economic development entities to recommend an organizational structure focused on improving coordination to bolster the state's economic competitiveness. A subsequent meeting is scheduled to establish clear expectations for the construct analysis initiative. The immediate next step is to create a statement of work to hire a contractor to assist with the effort.
- The review of Executive Order 01.01.2024.39 is ongoing. Commerce has gathered and compiled feedback from the Subcabinet, and is currently reviewing the information. Commerce will share what it plans to submit to the OGOV for consideration with the Subcabinet.
- Strategic Planning updates included an amendment issued for the Request for Proposals (RFP), which extended the deadline for questions to January 12, 2026, and proposals were received on February 4, 2026. The award is anticipated in mid-April.
- A draft version of the FY26 Implementation Plan is in the final stages of development. The goal is to have a final draft before the end of March.
- The Loaned Executive Program, a component of the Executive Order that established the GECS, is moving forward. The state program is being piloted at Commerce, and good progress for formalizing the program is being made in collaboration with the legal team.
- The recent county tours included Anne Arundel County, which will be the location for the March GECS meeting. A key part of the tour was a roundtable discussion, and GECS members are encouraged to attend future roundtables during upcoming county tours.

- Commerce continues to follow up on deliverables associated with the most recent trade missions and observe positive outcomes. Nature Cell, for instance, held a ribbon-cutting ceremony for its new Baltimore City facility, an outcome directly resulting from the Governor-led mission to Asia. A follow-up mission to the Middle East is planned for this calendar year.
- Recent pipeline successes encompassed 38 total opportunities, each representing a minimum of 50 new and/or at-risk employment positions.
- The following items were also presented for consideration:
 - A letter was received from a General Assembly member requesting support for the state's forestry industry.
 - Interest was expressed about further discussing the Sphere initiative, particularly determining how the GECS can offer support with implementation.
 - The trend of people living longer ("longevity culture") represents a substantial and possibly underestimated economic market across sectors like health, wellness, finance, leisure, and technology. Commerce plans to collaborate with the Department of Aging to emphasize this demographic's economic significance.

V. Discussion – Worcester County: Challenges and Themes

In support of the state’s aim to build a collaborative economic development ecosystem for growth, Ms. Melanie Pursel, Director, Tourism & Economic Development for Worcester County was invited to present on the challenges and opportunities within the county.

Maryland's regions possess distinct economies, and rural communities like Worcester County face unique challenges. For Worcester County's 54,000 residents, even 10-20 jobs can be transformative, highlighting the impact of scale on economic changes.

Rural economic development operates under constraints:

- Critical Area protections
- Agricultural zoning
- Limited developable land
- Smaller workforce base
- Seasonal tourism & agriculture economies

Absolute thresholds do not reflect these conditions and rural projects appear “smaller”- even when they are more efficient per capita. Rural projects often deliver stronger cost efficiency. The DECADE Act provides an opportunity to modernize evaluation criteria. There is a need to align standards with economic reality.

Recommendations:

- Population-adjusted scoring

- Rural-specific competitiveness criteria
- Recognition of seasonal economies
- Proportionate funding allocations

Worcester County Needs:

- Proportionate evaluation in state incentive programs.
- Rural criteria embedded in DECADE implementation.
- Formal rural advisory engagement.
- Rural Maryland is not asking for advantage, we are asking for equitable opportunity to compete.

Pressing issues:

- Infrastructure- water and sewer
- Transportation- Shore transit limited/flat funding- cutting routes
- Support for small towns DHCD/Main Street
- Housing- recent housing study shows lack of stock and affordability
- Increase in dedicated tourism dollars (TPA of 2008)

Members of the Subcabinet thanked Ms. Pursel for her work supporting rural communities in the state and discussion ensued regarding outreach and education to rural communities and often limited human resource capacity. Members suggested two key strategies: using the lower shore as a template for collaborative efforts in workforce development and grant acquisition for rural communities, and actively promoting public-private partnerships.

Actions:

- Melanie Pursel will follow up with Afiya Bey to distribute the Advocacy Report on Rural Tourism with the Subcabinet.
- The Subcabinet will collaborate to coordinate a GECS response to addressing challenges and incentives in rural communities.

VI. Maryland Energy Administration (MEA) Strategy

Newest GECS member, Director Kelly Speakes-Backman, provided an overview of the Maryland Energy Administration’s strategy. The Maryland Energy Administration (MEA) works to benefit Marylanders justly and equitably by promoting clean, affordable, and reliable energy, as well as reducing energy-related greenhouse gas emissions. Challenges remain, particularly concerning affordability, as Maryland is a net energy importer, leading to climbing electricity costs. There has been a recent success: PJM recently extended the price cap through 2030; however, there is still more that is needed.

MEA is working to build an affordable and reliable energy future.

Executive Order No. 01.01.2025.27 includes:

- Energy Subcabinet to coordinate interagency policy
- Energy Advisory Council for external stakeholder input
- Transmission Modernization Working Group on grid utilization strategies

Legislative Initiatives

Lower Bills and Local Power Act of 2026:

- Promotes new clean energy generation
- Allocates funding for MDOT
- Requires utilities consider ATTs
- Mandates utilities join PJM
- Provides \$100M in direct energy bill rebates to Maryland families

Programs

Focus on benefitting residents with low-to-moderate income:

- Maryland Solar Access Program
- Low to moderate incomes
- Up to \$7,500 for solar panels
- Residential Energy Equity Program
- nonprofits and local governments
- Supports energy efficiency and renewable energy projects

Secretary Coker shared that he would distribute the key points from the recent Energy Subcabinet meeting. Secretary Flora proposed a mapping exercise to overlay potential data center location sites with the related communications for these potential projects. A subsequent meeting is needed to discuss these interwoven items.

Actions:

- Commerce will convene the necessary stakeholders to discuss data center sites and communications around these locations.
- Secretary Coker will distribute the key points that resulted from the Energy Subcabinet meeting.

VII. Apprenticeships

Mr. Logan Dean presented an overview of the Department of Labor's apprenticeship programs. He highlights a snapshot of apprenticeships in Maryland. The Governor's goals include making Maryland a national leader in apprenticeship through cross-agency collaboration, system alignment, smart incentives, culture shifts, and myth busting. The Registered Apprenticeship for a Stronger Economy (RAISE) Act established new programs and investments to support employers and the Maryland Department of Labor provides free comprehensive apprenticeship consultation services for employers and industry groups.

The Subcabinet was asked to publicize apprenticeship opportunities. Additionally, they were asked to contact Mr. Dean about capacity building funds that will soon expire. Chancellor Perman welcomed the Department of Labor to provide education on Apprenticeships to his team, which would enable them to better support this initiative. It was also confirmed that American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA)

financial apprenticeships are applicable to state employees, further supporting the initiative.

National Apprenticeship week is April 26-May 2, 2026.

VIII. Discussion – Biannual Report Update

Ms. Mary Hanley presented the recent results and lessons learned from the Biannual Plan survey distributed to the Subcabinet. Survey results included feedback on each goal and proposed recommendations including identifying intersections between the goals, focusing on fundamentals, metrics for success, and putting in place the necessary infrastructure, work expertise, finance, incentives, tax policies, and permitting regulations to support Maryland’s competitive advantage.

Action: A copy of the survey results will be shared with the Subcabinet.

IX. Good of the Order

- Secretary Wu indicated that she would follow up to disseminate several recent announcements regarding Artificial Intelligence.
- Secretary Flora delivered an update on the Permitting Council, noting significant interest and support from the General Assembly. Agencies represented on the council are strongly encouraged to ensure their representatives attend the next meeting, as recommendations will be discussed.

X. Summary of Key Decisions and Actions

Ms. Smith highlighted several follow-up actions resulting from the meeting.

Action items for follow-up:

Action Items for Commerce:

- Secretary Coker to share key points regarding data centers from the Energy Subcabinet meeting.
- Initiate a convening of stakeholders to discuss data center site selection.
- Add discussion on supporting the Sphere implementation to future GECS meeting agenda.
- Distribute the following materials:
 - Speaking points that resulted from the Energy Subcabinet meeting.
 - Biannual Plan Survey Results
 - Apprenticeship Update materials and Maryland’s Public Sector Apprenticeship Landscape on behalf of the Department of Labor
 - Worcester County Slides and Advocacy Report on Rural Tourism on behalf of Melanie Pursel.

Action items for the Subcabinet:

- Coordinate a response on how to address challenges and incentives for rural communities.

XI. Adjournment

Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the meeting was adjourned at 2:53 p.m.