



October 4, 2024
401 E. Pratt Street, 17th Floor Conference Room
Baltimore
2:00pm – 3:30pm
Minutes

Members in Attendance:

Meryam Bouadjemi, Chair	Office of the Governor
Jimmie Briggs	Skoll Foundation - Virtual
Andy Forssell	Formerly HBO Max, Hulu
Renard Jenkins	Formerly Warner Bros. Discovery – Virtual
Sumi Parekh	Group Effort Initiative
Andrew Fuliniti for Secretary Portia Wu	Department of Labor – Virtual
Julie Woepke for Secretary Kevin Anderson	Department of Commerce

Guests:

Athena Hernandez	Office of the First Lady
Pansy Watson	Maryland Ethics Commission
Jennifer Gibbons	Entertainment Software Associates
John Favazza	Manis Canning & Associates
Jack Gerbes	Department of Commerce
Catherine Batavick	Department of Commerce – Virtual
Steven Skerritt-Davis	Department of Commerce – Virtual

I. Meeting called to Order

Chair Meryam Bouadjemi called the meeting to order at 2:03 PM.

II. Minutes of the September 6, 2024, Meeting

Chair Bouadjemi welcomed the Council to review the minutes and offer any amendments. Council Member Renard Jenkins suggested changing his title to “Former Warner Bros. Discovery” to better reflect his employment status. Upon a motion made and duly seconded, the amended minutes of September 6, 2024, were approved.

III. Ethics Commission Update

The enactment of House Bill 1487 of 2024 altered the Council’s membership, in addition to renaming it the Maryland Entertainment Industry Council, expanding its capabilities, staggering its terms, removing its sunset provision, and requiring the submission for an annual report. Due to the Council’s increased authority, each Council member is required to submit a financial disclosure to ensure fair practices. Chair

Bouadjemi invited Pansy Watson, representative of the Maryland Ethics Commission, to give a presentation on public ethics law and the process of submitting financial disclosures. She started the presentation by giving an overview of the functions and purpose of the Maryland Ethics Commission, which establishes ethical guidelines and financial disclosure reporting for elected and public officials, state employees, and board and commission members. Mrs. Watson then continued by describing the various conflicts of interest, which include participation in matters one or a qualifying relative has a vested interest in, conflicting employment, receiving gifts, utilizing one's prestige, and releasing confidential information. Finally, Mrs. Watson explained where the council members can find the financial disclosure form and how to complete it. She assured the Council that it is a quick process and that the commission was there to aid them if needed.

A few questions were raised during the presentation. For example, Executive Director Julie Woepke was wondering whether the members that were appointed in December would still be able to apply for exemptions. Pansy Watson said they would likely be able to but that she would check with her team. Furthermore, Meryam Bouadjemi was wondering if Ruchi Bhowmik's employment at Netflix would pose any problems for her membership on the Council. Mrs. Watson said it would be fine if there were no direct dealings between Netflix and the Council.

IV. Chair's Report

Chair Bouadjemi described the Governor's appearance at the Motion Picture Association. Some of the most important industry leaders were in attendance, including representatives from Warner Bros, Paramount, Sony, Disney, and Netflix. Governor Moore's speech conveyed a long-term commitment to the entertainment industry, signaling to the attendees that Maryland is a destination for film productions.

Chair Bouadjemi continued by announcing that the Council will support the removal of the cap per project provision. She acknowledged Council Member David O'Farrell's opposition to the reform and explained that his concerns were valid. Chair Bouadjemi reiterated that the Council will make bolder recommendations the following year, which could include increased funding for Maryland's film tax credit program. However, such recommendations cannot currently be submitted to Governor Moore given the budgetary landscape and the MEIC's recent establishment. Chair Bouadjemi explained that it is important to first demonstrate the MEIC's capabilities and successes before promoting a bold plan. Supporting the removal of the cap per project is a good first step in signaling serious reform while not making unrealistic demands.

Additionally, Chair Bouadjemi discussed the workgroups that were created, which will meet independently between MEIC meetings. Council Member Jimmie Briggs agreed to lead the Arts, Culture, and Promotion workgroup. The other two workgroups, Physical Production and Technology and Entertainment, are to be formalized in the coming weeks. She explained that an email will be sent out with further information on the workgroups and that members can provide feedback on the proposed plan.

Finally, Chair Bouadjemi introduced Athena Hernandez, the Chief of Staff to the First Lady. Mrs. Hernandez thanked the Chair for inviting her and described her eagerness to work with the Council. She spoke about Preakness, a horse racing competition held in Maryland each year. She urged the MEIC to elevate the events' status and reach to match that of the Kentucky Derby. Mrs. Hernandez hoped that a performing arts element could be integrated into Preakness to give it a broader appeal.

V. Entertainment Software Associates

Chair Bouadjemi invited Jennifer Gibbons, representative of Entertainment Software Associates, to give a presentation on the video game industry, which provided demographic and economic data on the industry. For example, she provided male vs. female participations statistics, age participation statistics, device usage, motivations to play, and top genres. On the economic side, the number of jobs created in the US, contributions to total GDP, contributions to tax revenue, and employment data were provided. What was particularly useful was that the presentation displayed both national data and Maryland specific statistics. For example, the total economic impact of the Maryland Video Game Industry is USD 1 billion and covers 3,687 jobs. This places Maryland as the 12th best state for video game employment and economic output. Overall, the presentation highlighted that the video game industry is exponentially growing and a significant contributor to the creative economy.

Council member Renard Jenkins thanked Mrs. Gibbons for her presentation and stated his support for investing in this industry. He continued by saying that the video game industry contracted in 2024 and asked Mrs. Gibbons if this was only seen within the dominant video game companies or whether it was an industry-wide phenomenon. Mrs. Gibbons was unsure about the financial situation of small firms so was unable to provide a proper analysis of the industry. However, she assured Mr. Jenkins that the industry is facing temporary challenges but that the long-term trends are still exponential and positive.

VI. Good of the Order

Chair Bouadjemi directed Timothy McGowan to send an email to the Council with the Maryland Ethics Commission link and all the meeting materials. The next MEIC meeting will be held January 31st.

VII. Adjournment

Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the meeting was adjourned at 3:28pm.