



February 9, 2024  
60 West Street, Suite 100, Annapolis  
1:00pm – 2:30pm  
**Minutes**

**Members in Attendance:**

Meryam Bouadjemi, Chair	Office of the Governor
Ruchi Bhowmik	Netflix – Virtual
Andy Forssell	HBO Max, Hulu – Virtual
Renard Jenkins	Warner Bros. Discovery – Virtual
David O’Ferrall	IASTE Local 487
Sumi Parekh	Group Effort Initiative – Virtual
Judee Ann Williams	Creative Arts Agency – Virtual

**Guests:**

Jennifer LaHatte	Department of Commerce – Virtual
Julie Woepke	Department of Commerce
Jerel Registre	Department of Commerce
Walter Donoughe	Department of Commerce
Liz Fitzsimmons	Department of Commerce
Jack Gerbes	Department of Commerce
Catherine Batavick	Department of Commerce
Nick Manis	Manis Canning & Associates

**I. Meeting called to Order**

Chair Meryam Bouadjemi called the meeting to order at 1:05 PM and welcomed all members and attendees. She thanked the Maryland Chamber of Commerce for hosting the inaugural meeting of the Maryland Entertainment Council.

Chair Bouadjemi thanked the Council members for serving and emphasized the importance of the Council in creating a more equitable, competitive, and innovative economy by investing in the industries of the future. She acknowledged the breadth and wealth of talent among the Council members and relayed the gratitude of the Moore Miller Administration to Council members as well.

**II. Welcome & Introductions**

Chair Bouadjemi opened the meeting to all members and guests to provide a brief personal introduction.

**III. Mission of the Council**

Chair Bouadjemi reviewed the mission of the Council. Identify and leverage our assets to expand the economic impact of Media and Entertainment and to set Maryland on the path to be a leader in the future of this sector.

#### **IV. Role of the Council - Governor's Economic Agenda**

On behalf of the Moore-Miller Administration, Chair Bouadjemi introduced the Governor's new State Plan and the importance of measuring key performance indicators (KPIs) of the plan. She specifically stressed the Governor's charge organizing an interdisciplinary slate of leaders across entertainment to shape Maryland's strategic position in the Media and Entertainment industry, as the Council's "north star." She expressed the goal to making Maryland an integral part of growing entertainment revenues, as the State could receive massive returns on investment in this industry. She noted that the focus of this Council should be on the future of the entertainment sector, and that the Moore Miller Administration has given the Council permission to 'dream big' in their recommendations.

#### **V. Council Organizational Items**

Ms. Julie Woepke, Executive Director of the Maryland Economic Development Commission, began by presenting an overview of Commerce to Council members. She briefly described the mission and operations of the Department and referenced a handout that detailed the functions of the Business and Industry Development office and the loan and grant programs; tax credits; impacts from incentives; composition and purpose of the Regional Business Growth and Retention Team; Office of International Investment and Trade; Military and Federal Affairs; Marketing and Public Relations; Maryland Marketing Partnership; Tourism; Maryland State Arts Council; Maryland Film Office; and the Boards and Commissions that partner with the Department. She cited the pages related to the Tourism and Film Offices and the Arts Council.

Ms. Woepke guided Council members through a summary of Maryland's public ethics law, highlighting the conflict-of-interest section and urging members not to use their position on this Council for personal financial gain. Ms. Woepke also referenced expense report forms and noted that members may need to file these forms if they choose to travel to Maryland's Film Festival in early May. She offered assistance.

#### **VI. SWOT Analysis**

Chair Bouadjemi started her presentation with an overview of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats within Maryland's entertainment industry. She noted the entertainment industry in Maryland matches most other economic sectors, in that it is asset rich, but strategy poor.

Chair Bouadjemi praised the State for having great scenic and cultural diversity, which allows for a broad spectrum of film production possibilities. She also pointed out that Maryland's proximity to Washington, DC offers potential for Maryland to establish a fruitful relationship with DC-based entertainment programs like the White House Correspondents Dinner. Maryland's geographic location also allows for overnight travel to one-third (1/3) of the United States population, making the state a good landing spot for long-distance productions. Similarly, she noted that Maryland offers great entertainment workforce potential between its highly reputable film crews and promising undergraduate and graduate film and television programs.

As for the State's weaknesses, Chair Bouadjemi pointed to Maryland's high cost of living, lack of permanent entertainment facilities, limited depth of Union Workforce, and disjointed tax policy surrounding the Media and Entertainment Industry as reasons why the entertainment industry has not grown in the State. She proceeded to discuss the State's entertainment industry opportunities, including the increase in film production incentives, budding local live events and culture hubs, and a surging creator economy. She concluded with a discussion of potential threats to entertainment industry growth,

including artificial intelligence (AI) worker displacement and related labor disputes and a competitive, rapidly evolving regional market.

## **VII. Maryland's Film Production Activity Income Tax Credit Program & Past Productions**

Mr. Jack Gerbes, Director, and Ms. Catherine Batavick, Deputy Director, from the Commerce Film Office presented a brief history of Maryland's film production tax credit programs and major productions over the last decade. They noted that Maryland's film tax credits varied significantly, having flowed up and down over the last decade.

Mr. Gerbes and Ms. Batavick discussed additional inhibitors to the growth of the entertainment industry in the State, including the inconsistency of available warehouse space for lease to production studios—especially as data centers take up a majority of warehouse real estate. Additionally, they pointed out the success of local graduate film programs but shared that most students cannot find employment in Maryland due to the low number of productions in the State. However, they expressed their optimism for the film industry thanks to Governor Moore, who is the first governor in Maryland to openly express his support for the film industry.

## **VIII. Discussion and Next Steps**

To conclude, Council members discussed setting a cadence for future meetings and inviting guest speakers from the Moore-Miller Administration. Members also discussed possible future meeting dates, and asked Commerce staff to provide information related to Maryland's existing financial incentives for entertainment infrastructure development.

## **IX. Adjournment**

Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the meeting was adjourned at 2:30 PM.