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**GOVERNOR O'MALLEY ANNOUNCES NEW OUTREACH PROGRAM
TO HELP CERTIFY MINORITY BUSINESSES FOR STATE AND FEDERAL CONTRACTS**

*MDOT's MBE Office to Hold First Free Application Assistance Workshop
on Tuesday, January 6, 2009*

December 30, 2008 (Hanover, MD) – Governor Martin O'Malley today announced a new outreach program to help certify eligible small and minority businesses as Minority Business Enterprises (MBE) or Disadvantaged Business enterprises (DBE). The State certification opens up a myriad of new work opportunities for these firms on State, local and federal government projects. The Maryland Department of Transportation's (MDOT) Office of Minority Business Enterprise (OMBE) will provide a series of free Application Assistance Workshops to provide hands-on assistance to firms seeking MBE or DBE certification.

"This outreach program is another step forward in the O'Malley-Brown Administration's efforts to expand opportunity to more Marylanders, rather than fewer," said Governor O'Malley. "In today's economy, these opportunities serve to improve the quality of life for our residents throughout Maryland, while working to strengthen and modernize our critical infrastructure. Small and minority businesses will now have greater access to business opportunities across the State."

OMBE Director Zenita Wickham Hurley is encouraging all small and minority businesses to participate in this free workshop. The workshop will be particularly helpful to: firms interested in learning about the benefits of certification, firms that have specific questions about the application process, or firms that would like assistance in completing the application.

"These workshops will help provide assistance to all businesses that are looking for new opportunities," said Ms. Wickham Hurley. "We are committed to enhancing the earning prospects for small and minority-owned businesses in Maryland. I am very confident that the Application Assistance Workshops will be a very valuable tool for firms seeking certification."

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OMBE's Application Assistance Workshop includes a comprehensive overview of the State's MBE and DBE certification programs. Participants will receive valuable information about the application process and procurement opportunities available to certified firms. Experienced certification officers will be on-site to answer questions or provide one-on-one assistance to individual participants. Special guests from other State agencies will also be participating in the workshops.

"We are pleased to support MDOT's Office of MBE on this exciting outreach initiative," stated Luwanda Jenkins, Special Secretary, Governor's Office of Minority Affairs. "Providing greater access to business opportunities in State government and information to assist MBE firms to be competitive remains an important goal of the O'Malley/Brown Administration's commitment to increased minority inclusion."

OMBE's Application Assistance Workshop will be held the first Tuesday of every month. The first workshop of 2009 will be held on Tuesday, January 6, 2009, from 10 am to 1 pm at the Maryland Department of Transportation's headquarters located at 7201 Corporate Center Drive in Hanover. Pre-registration is not required. All participants must show photo identification upon entering the building. For more information about the Application Assistance Workshop, contact OMBE at 410-865-1269.

The Office of Minority Business Enterprise (OMBE) is the official certification agency of the State of Maryland. Firms meeting the standards set forth in State and federal law are eligible for Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) and/or Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) certification. OMBE's comprehensive certification process ensures that bona fide disadvantaged or minority-owned firms receive the MBE/DBE designation in support of the State's minority business inclusion efforts.

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