



# ROBERT G. CASSILLY

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## Harford County Executive

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### **Maryland Awards \$500K for Biomanufacturing Incubator at Harford County Facility Near Aberdeen Proving Ground; Funding to Retrofit Former HEAT Center with Wetlabs**

**BEL AIR, Md.**, (July 1, 2024) - Maryland Department of Commerce has awarded \$500K to Baltimore-based Early Charm to develop a biomanufacturing incubator at a Harford County-owned facility near Aberdeen Proving Ground (APG). The funding from the state's Build Our Future grant will be used to upgrade the CONVERGE Innovation Center, formerly known as the HEAT Center, located at the I-95/Aberdeen interchange.

Biomanufacturing is the use of biological processes to build new materials such as body armor made from spider silk, three times the strength of Kevlar. This technology has the potential to revolutionize manufacturing.

Since 2012, Early Charm has been creating, owning, and operating ventures that convert university and federal lab inventions into commercial products that it manufactures in the Pigtown neighborhood of Baltimore. Those products include advanced materials such as 3D printed ceramics for power electronics, nanofibers for hydrogen fuel cells, flame retardants for the army combat uniform, and biologics modeling software for drug design.

"When the Harford County Economic Development team explained their vision for growing a biotech hub associated with APG and introduced me to the Army's needs to biomanufacture advanced materials, we saw a great opportunity to partner" said Ken Malone, Executive Officer of Early Charm. "We have deep expertise in advanced materials and are accustomed to working

with the Army. Add in APG's expertise in biomanufacturing and the visionary support that the MD Department of Commerce is providing, and we think expanding our operations into Harford County is going to be a great success."

Harford County Department of Economic Development spearheaded Early Charm's application to capture funding for this project. Once completed, the project will advance Harford as a hub for commercializing advancements in biomanufacturing developed by APG and its defense contractors. Harford County is part of the Greater Baltimore Region named earlier this year as one of 31 federal Tech Hubs by the US Economic Development Administration.

Through Harford County's partnership with Harford Community College, the CONVERGE facility will also serve as a center for workforce development and support for innovative startups. Data science classes have already begun at the site. Programming to help introduce the community college's students to materials development and workforce training will begin promptly upon completion of the building's final renovations.

"We are excited by this grant award and the state's support of our vision for the CONVERGE Innovation Center as a hub for scientific discovery, entrepreneurship and workforce development in northeastern Maryland," County Executive Bob Cassilly said. "This project will bring extraordinary opportunities to advance biomanufacturing's commercial applications and bring well-paying jobs to Harford County and the region. I would like to thank Maryland Department of Commerce for this funding; Early Charm and Harford Community College for their partnership, and the highly skilled professionals in our Department of Economic Development who captained this successful team effort."

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