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Prince George's County House Delegation  
House Office Building, Room 207  
6 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: 2018 Proposed Local and Bi-County Legislation

Dear Chairman Walker and Members of the Prince George's County House Delegation:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide both written and oral testimony on the proposed local legislation for the upcoming 2018 Maryland General Assembly session. I read in detail and with great care the proposals put forth by the Delegation. Thank to each delegate and senator that put forth thoughtful and meaningful legislation to move our County in the right direction and to improve our quality of life. I offer the following comments on each of the 27 bills currently posted on the Delegation's website.

***PG400-18 – Delegate Angel – Vacant and Abandoned Property – Special Tax Rate***

I generally oppose regressive taxes that seek to increase taxes on hard-working citizens and middle-class families. While I think I understand that the goal of this bill is probably to help move abandoned properties from the County's foreclosure rolls, a 15% increase in the property tax rate may have unintended consequences. If the homeowner of record is a deceased person and the family members are still trying to work through the probate process, it would be unfair to heirs if a contested probate process has resulted in the property being abandoned or neglected for longer than desired.

I think a friendly amendment to exclude properties currently in probate would be helpful. Additionally, this legislation should only apply to properties in foreclosure where the mortgage company/bank is controlling the process. If the bill remains as is, **I OPPOSE this legislation.**

***PG401-18 – Delegates Valentino-Smith, Barnes, Barren, Holmes, Howard, Pena-Melnayk & Tarlau - Asset Transfer for Magnetic Levitation Transportation System - Municipal Agreement***

This bill simply seeks to require the County to negotiate a written agreement with any municipality before the transfer of County assets for the construction of the proposed NE Corridor (DC to NY) Magnetic-Levitation Transportation System, and to seek the municipalities approval along with the sharing of finances received for the sale of County assets. This seems fair. **I SUPPORT this bill.**

***PG402-18 - Delegates Valentino-Smith, Barnes, Barren, Holmes, Howard, Pena-Melnayk & Tarlau - Asset Transfer for Maglev- Hearing and Approval Requirements***

This bill simply seeks to require public hearings on Maglev before any County asset is sold. I AGREE. This whole issue of Maglev has caught the County leaders and residents unaware. How is that City of Baltimore has already signed an agreement for the construction of Maglev and public hearings were not held in our County. It wasn't until the County Council raised the issues that citizens really became aware of this project. This allowing the ink to dry and then notify Prince George's County residents demonstrates a lack of respect for our citizenry so **I SUPPORT this bill.** I do not want to impede progress

and an excellent mode of transportation, but our County's input, particularly from its residents, is necessary.

***PG403-18 – Delegate Walker - Video Lottery Facility - Local Development Council Membership***

I was surprised when I attend my last LDC meeting to see a resident of Charles County sitting on Council. This member really has no stake in local impact of gaming at MGM on the local communities of Oxon Hill, Ft. Washington, Town of Forest Heights, Glassmanor, Temple Hills, Accokeek and Clinton. Therefore, I **SUPPORT** the proposed legislation as written but would probably specifically name the communities or town listed above. I also support having the sitting District 8 Council member to be a member of the LDC.

***PG404-18 – Delegate Walker - Vacant and Abandoned Residential Property – Foreclosure***

This bill would compel the mortgagee to complete the mortgage foreclosure process within "reasonable period of time as determined by a court." Again, I think I understand that the goal of this bill is probably to help move abandoned properties from the County's foreclosure rolls. I think the proposal is not objective enough and that a definitive time frame would be more beneficial. I support the idea of the bill, but not the wording which can be left up to interpretation by each individual judge/s. In its current form, I OPPOSE the bill. I too struggle with what should be considered a reasonable period, but the banks and mortgage companies are sophisticated entities with many resources. They should be able to complete the process within a 6-month period. Six months should be enough time to allow for mandatory mediation with the homeowner and other steps in the foreclosure process. The real question is whether the District Court (and/or bankruptcy court) is backlogged and can complete this process in six months.

***PG405-18 – Delegate Walker – Property Tax Credit for Security Camera System***

This bill would allow the County to grant tax credit to homeowners and commercial businesses to receive a tax credit of \$200 per camera (residential) (not more than \$500) and \$750 for commercial businesses annually. The County Council would decide the duration of the tax credit and the application process. This is laudable for the purposes of aiding in crime prevention and reduction. **I SUPPORT the bill.** I do wonder if the administration of the tax credit can be simplified for both the County and state.

***PG407-18 – Delegate Angel – Property Tax – Homeowners Property Tax Credit Supplement***

This bill eliminates the property tax credit if you have a combined net worth of \$200,000 or more. I **OPPOSE this bill.** This proposed bill would simply increase taxes paid for certain income-earners. The property tax credit is and should remain the same for all homeowners regardless of income.

***PG408-18 – Delegate Angel – Affordable Housing Commission***

This bill would create a 12-member commission to study homelessness and housing conditions in the County, and provide a report to the House & Senate delegations as well as the Governor's office. The report would presumably recommend ways to eradicate homelessness as well ensure affordable housing in the County. **I SUPPORT this bill.**

***PG409-18 – Delegate Angel - Landlord Tenant Alternative Dispute Resolution***

This bill would establish a ADR program for L/T cases in the Prince George's County District Court. While ADR would assist in reducing the backlog of L/T cases in the court system, I am somewhat leery of ADR process, which generally does not favor the consumer (or in this case the tenant). Since the proposed bill does not indicate that the ADR program is mandatory, **I SUPPORT the bill.** I believe both tenants and landlords should have the option to litigate their cases.

***PG410-18 – Delegate Angel – Task Force to Study the Health and & Safety for Rental Housing***

This bill would create a 13-member task force to provide an interim report by September 2018 and final report by January 2019 to the County's State Delegation for establishing minimum health and safety standards for rental buildings. I thought the state and County codes already provided for minimum health and safety standards, so I am somewhat unclear as to why we need a task force to study this more. What we really need (as with many laws and regulations on the books) is to enforce what is currently there. I think of the LynHill Condo matter, and how more enforcement of County code to keep a rental property from developing into the state that it was in. The real question is how do you hold absent condo owners accountable for the health and safety of their condo units. Perhaps the task force will make recommendations in this regard, so **I SUPPORT this bill**.

***PG411-18 – Delegate Angel – Prince George's Environmental Justice Commission***

This bill creates a 6-member commission to address environmental justice issues in the County and report the findings to the House Delegation by December 2018. I SUPPORT this bill and think that some specificity is warranted. For example, this commission should examine: (1) impacts of clean air and water in Brandywine in light of the natural gas companies; (2) evaluate the impact of the mountains of construction debris landfills throughout the County and recommend eradication of such zoning; (3) recommend the inclusion of health/environmental impact as part of the current Zoning Rewrite; (4) study the placement of medical marijuana dispensaries in other states and their impact on the youth; and (5) examine food deserts and food equity in the County. With these specific directives, **I SUPPORT this bill**.

***PG412-18 – Delegate Proctor – Sale of Residential Real Property – Commercial Advertising***

This bill requires developers to provide notice to potential homebuyers of the amenities that are to be included in a development and when those amenities will be built. **I SUPPORT this bill**. Delegate Proctor's own HOA was supposed to be a golf course community and sold to homebuyers as such, but the developer never built the golf course and has conveniently built townhomes on the land instead.

***PG501-18 – Elementary Schools – Limit on Class Size***

This bill proposes to limit the number of students in a K-3 to not greater than 30. Thirty students in a classroom is still too large, and the maximum number should be lowered to 20. Obviously, this will have a financial impact (presumably more teachers and paraprofessionals need to be hired), but with so much money (gaming) going to schools, the County (and state) should be able to afford this reasonable educational request. **I will SUPPORT the bill if the number is reduced to 20.**

***PG504-18 – Valentino-Smith -Student Vision and Hearing Screening – Reporting Requirements***

This bill would require PGCPS to report to the State Dept of Health the number of students who received recommended vision and hearing services after failing the screenings. It also requires the Board of Education to establish a strategy to increase the number of student receiving vision and hearing services. I think I understand the purpose of this bill is to ensure that our students are not negatively impacted academically by sight or hearing problems. I like the concept, but who is administering the screenings and are all children getting screened? I think this is a matter of health disparities and the real issue may need to be to expand CHIP in Maryland to ensure that all students receive these screenings and glasses/hearing aids if needed. The only to ensure that is to require the screenings in each school and seeking partnership with retail eyewear or hearing aid companies to provide discounted services. Identifying the number alone does not resolve the problem. Therefore, without more, **I OPPOSE the bill**.

**PG506-18 – Delegate Angel - Students with Disabilities Report**

This bill would track the number of students with disabilities and determine if their discipline rates are excessive. It will track expulsions, suspensions, rate of transfers to other schools, rate of mid-year withdrawals; ethnicity; play ground access; access to elevators; number of staff dedicated to students with disabilities and report the findings to the House Delegation by January 2019. **I SUPPORT the concept of this bill.** I suspect that PGCPS already has this information, but received by the Delegation what will become of it? What policy changes will the Delegation make because of having this information?

Now let's juxtapose the next 3 bills on the structure and operation of the PGCPS Board of Education (BOE).

**PG507-18 – Delegate Walker – Election of Vice Chair and Voting Process**

This bill would repeal the County Executive's appointment of the BOE Vice Chair, and permit the Vice Chair to be selected by the elected members of the BOE, and reduce to 3/5, the number of BOE members needed to override an action of the CEO of PGCPS. This is a good bill, but not strong enough.

**PG509-18 – Senator Muse - Board of Education Governance**

The bill would return the selection of the BOE chair and vice chair to the Board, not the County Executive and the BOE would also select the PGCPS CEO.

**PG511-18 – Senator Muse – Academic Revitalization – Repeal**

This bill would allow for a special election to fill any vacancy on the BOE with a special election (not appointed by the County Executive).

Senator Muse's bills are stronger in returning the BOE and its accountability to the stakeholders (voters who elected the BOE) so **I SUPPORT 509 & 511** as stronger attempts to return to an elected BOE. I am not opposed to a hybrid BOE with smaller number of appointed members, but the control and power of the BOE can no longer be centralized in the office of the County Executive. This process has not worked for PGCPS. Under this administration, we have seen the lost of federal Head Start money, revelation of abuse of students in our schools, over correction of the abuse problem that has led to long-term substitutes teaching, school buildings that are making our students sick with mold and lead in the water, and now the doctored graduation rates. Parents, students, teachers and administrators do not like what we see with the bloated CEO administration. We need to have the strongest legislation in place to undo the education power grab of this administration. It did not work, and no one is being held accountable at the top.

**PG510-18 – Teachers and Administrators Child Protective Services Investigation**

This bill requires that PGCPS accept for employment and hiring purposes the findings of the Child Protective Services regarding abuse. **I SUPPORT this bill.**

**PG512-18 – Senator Rosapepe & Delegate Valentino-Smith – Overcrowding Reduction Act of 2018**

This bill is a misnomer and has very little, if anything, to do with reducing class sizes. It seems to focus primarily on allowing the use of public school buildings by private entities, use of alternate private financing for the construction of schools. However, there is already MD state legislation that permits a builder/developer to build a public school in the County, which has NEVER been used since its enactment. I think I understand the rationale behind the bill which is contentious if it continues to promote virtually dedicating a public school building primarily for UMDCP faculty's children. The only

portion of the bill that I like is the requirement for a 10% increase in the state contribution to the construction costs if the costs are 30% more than rolling state average. Because I do not see how this bill will reduce school overcrowding and the County has yet to require a developer to build a school under the current legislation, **I OPPOSE this bill.**

***PG302-18 – Delegate Valderama – Speed Monitoring System Route 210***

This bill allows for speed cameras along Route 210. Due to the excessive rate of traffic fatalities along this highway (an average of 6 per year), **I SUPPORT this bill.** Let's keep MD 210 safe.

***PG303-18 – Senator Rosapepe and Delegate Barnes – Alcoholic Beverage – Class BLX – Movie Theaters***

This bill is targeted to movie theaters in Greenbelt, near Capital Beltway and Livingston Road. It will allow liquor sales at the movie theaters between the hours of noon-12:30 a.m. **I OPPOSE this bill.** It does not promote family entertainment and if considered should be amended to limit such sales to late night hours only (for shows starting after 9 p.m. and rated for adults only).

***PG304-18 – Delegate Valentino-Smith – Alcoholic Beverage – Entertainment Permits Exception***

**I SUPPORT this bill.** It seeks to ensure that before a family entertainment business can get a liquor license, it must first legitimately be providing entertainment.

***PGMC-102-18 – Delegate Tarlau - Special Exception Hearings – Required Notice***

Often, community members are silenced and shut out of the development or design phase of a proposed development simply because they were not notified. Therefore, **I SUPPORT this bill** to require notice to all persons of records for any hearing on cases of Special Exceptions.

***PGMC-103-18 – Delegate Walker – Connection Pipe Emergency Replacement Loan Program***

This bill requires WSSC to create a loan program for the replacement of certain pipes and on certain properties. The loan would be not more than \$5,000 and administered on a first -come, first-served basis. **I SUPPORT this bill.**

***PGMC-108-18 – Delegate Holmes -MD -Washington Regional – Prince George’s Municipal Authority***

This bill seeks to give local municipalities the authority to exceed height limitations that are set by the zoning authority and Planning Board of the County (in this instance, a fence). **I OPPOSE this bill.** The MNCPPC has expertise in zoning and planning, and the limitations set should and do have a valid rationale. Local municipalities should not usurp this expertise unless done so by their own planning board, which is non-existent in any of the County's municipalities.

***PGMC-109-18- Delegate Holmes – Public Utilities Property Management***

This bill requires each public utility company to establish policies for administering public utility service with property managers of managed facilities. It seems akin to PG410-18, but requires the utilities to work with property managers. It is a stronger bill in that it does more than simply study the issue. **I SUPPORT this bill.**

***PGMC-111-18 – Delegate Carr – Funding Accountability and Transparency Act***

I'm all for accountability and transparency. This bill requires WSSC to establish a website (or on its website) a page that discloses the payees of \$25,000 or more in a single fiscal year. **I SUPPORT this bill** and really, all payments using ratepayers' funding should be disclosed to the public.

***PGMC-112-18 – WSSC - Service Charges***

This is the only bill not sponsored by a state legislator, but by WSSC itself. It seeks to establish classes of customers to charge different rates. You may now know that WSSC proposed and implemented a new rate structure, which would ultimately increase the water bills for everyone. I suspect this WSSC-sponsored legislation helps to implement the new rate structure. **I OPPOSE the bill** because it also contemplates other charges and does not eliminate the Account Maintenance Fee, which was implemented not too long ago and recently increased within the last two years. While I empathize with WSSC on its infrastructure replacement needs, incremental improvements should have been occurring for the past 3 decades instead of ensuring stockholders were receiving a dividend.

Due to the length of these comments, I will not be able to make an oral presentation in the time frame allotted, but do ask that careful review and consideration be given.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments as you deliberate legislation in the upcoming 2018 General Assembly session.

Very truly,

Tamara Davis Brown