

Town of Bladensburg

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January 29, 2021

Honorable Delegate Kumar P. Barve
Chair, House Environment and Transportation Committee
Room 251, House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chairman Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

I am Mayor Takisha James, of the Town of Bladensburg, located in Prince George's County. I want to begin by thanking you for the opportunity to submit written and oral testimony in favor of HB0510, entitled Transportation - Private Sector Transportation Projects Ombudsman – Establishment sponsored by Delegate Geraldine Valentino-Smith. I am strongly in favor of this legislation and urge each of you to support it as well.

As elected officials, we have a responsibility to ensure our spheres of government function with transparency, accountability and provide access to public information in a timely fashion. The position of an Ombudsman within the Department of Transportation will immediately allow these basic ideals to be accomplished as they will be responsible to address concerns, complaints, and other requests for information regarding private sector transportation projects.

The need for this position became abundantly clear with the proposed SCMAGLEV project. Members of the public have had an unusually difficult time with requesting specific financial information, as well as community and environmental impacts regarding this project. For something that is billed as "good for our communities, it shouldn't be complicated to receive information such as an accounting of where the developer funding has originated from and exactly how much funding has been provided by taxpayers through state or federal dollars. As an example, should we be able to know if funding is coming from a country that is not friendly toward the United States. This could pose a variety of concerns if not made available to the public in a reasonable timeframe.

In supporting this legislation, I also ask for your support with ensuring the Ombudsman position is provided all of the necessary resources to conduct the job requirements in a timely manner.

I applaud Delegate Valentino-Smith for gathering input from community stakeholders that have experienced challenges in this area and for being responsive to our concerns by seeking to take action with HB0510.

Thank you again for this opportunity.

Sincerely,

Takisha D. James

Mayor, Town of Bladensburg