
February 1, 2023

The Honorable Melony Griffith
Chair, Senate Finance Committee
3 East, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Letter of Opposition – SB 117 – State Highway Administration – Litter Collection and Mowing

Dear Chair Griffith and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) respectfully opposes Senate Bill 117, which prescribes the MDOT State Highway Administration (SHA) to follow a specific litter collection and mowing schedule.

The SHA regards turf grass management and litter removal as a vital maintenance activity that requires thoughtful planning, scheduling, and supervision to achieve a safe, functional, sustainable, and attractive highway system. The SHA's Turfgrass Management Guidelines are designed to balance environmental stewardship with drainage system preservation, highway safety, and roadside aesthetics.

Currently, the SHA removes litter from State-owned roadways on a monthly cycle, costing an annual average of \$8 million. Mowing services, which are completed on a 4 – 6 week cycle during the growing season, cost an annual average of \$12.3 million. Senate Bill 117 would require the SHA to increase the current litter removal and mowing schedule to twice a month, doubling annual expenditures to approximately \$16.6 million and approximately \$31 million, respectively. The SHA anticipates a total increased cost of at least \$20 million, exclusive of the purchase and maintenance of additional equipment or possible increase in contracting unit prices.

During the summer of 2022, the MDOT launched a Statewide anti-litter campaign to educate Marylanders on the cost of litter, urging everyone to act with care and dispose of waste appropriately. During this time, the MDOT passed out litter bags to the public, and released educational videos on the impacts of litter on the environment and budget, as well as appropriate ways to dispose of garbage.

While the SHA utilizes critical partnerships with local jurisdictions and the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) to help address highway litter removal, most litter removal and mowing activities are supported by contractors. Senate Bill 117 would require the SHA to contract with specific Maryland-based companies, giving preference to county-based companies that hire formerly incarcerated individuals. While the SHA supports the intent of this

The Honorable Melony Griffith
Page Two

requirement, it could lead to unintended consequences making it more difficult for minority businesses to successfully bid.

This drastic increase in work volume could overwhelm the capabilities of small business contractors, particularly during current times of labor shortages and increased operating costs. To meet the requirements of this legislation SHA would need to expand the workforce and fleet of equipment, which would be challenging under current recruitment and supply chain challenges. For these reasons, this legislation would likely result in diverting resources from other maintenance activities, such as pavement patching, sign maintenance, and drainage.

In addition to the financial and operational limitations that result from the requirements of Senate Bill 117, there are environmental concerns to consider as it relates to the increased mowing frequencies. Several years ago, the SHA embarked on a reduced mowing program by returning selected areas of grassed roadsides to meadows and forests. Throughout this process, the SHA decreased the number of acres being mowed and the number of mowing cycles in a season, which created areas that benefit wildlife and improved water quality by capturing and containing runoff after storms. Additionally, the increased frequency of mowing with fossil fuel burning equipment will add harmful greenhouse gas emissions. Legislation passed in recent years requires a decrease of emissions to help meet aggressive State reduction goals. An increase in mowing frequency would be in direct conflict with these State goals.

For these reasons, the Maryland Department of Transportation respectfully requests the Committee grant Senate Bill 117 an unfavorable report.

Respectfully submitted,

Mitch Baldwin
Acting Deputy Director
Office of Policy & Legislative Services
Maryland State Highway Administration
443-310-1056

Pilar Helm
Director
Office of Government Affairs
Maryland Department of Transportation
410-865-1090