



OUR MISSION:

Working to enhance the economic prosperity of greater Silver Spring through robust promotion of our member businesses and unrelenting advocacy on their behalf.

February 13, 2024

The Honorable Marc Korman
and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee
House Office Building
6 Bladen St.
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chairperson Korman and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Greater Silver Spring Chamber of Commerce, representing more than 300 employers, mostly small and minority owned businesses, in greater Silver Spring and surrounding areas in Montgomery County, we are submitting these comments of strong support for Senate Bill 442 and House Bill 601. After even more recent events, we are convinced now, more than ever, that this legislation will have a significant positive impact on the Silver Spring community and the State of Maryland as a whole.

The Chamber has always been about making greater Silver Spring a thriving business community, a place where people want to live, work, and come to enjoy what so many of us love about Silver Spring – our wonderful arts and entertainment venues, our breweries, our “United Nations” of restaurants, and our outdoor gathering spaces. But, like most everyone, we have been distressed about increased criminal activity, in many forms, that has invaded our community. In particular, the uptick in street takeovers and racing up and down the Route 29/Colesville Rd corridor is having a negative impact on the community and its overall safety.

This past weekend’s incident at the intersection of New Hampshire Ave and Ethan Allen Ave. in Takoma Park, puts a glaring spotlight on the necessity for legislation that more meaningfully addresses and penalizes these street takeovers. It is clear that current regulations are insufficient and do nothing to deter this type of crime and the perpetrators in these instances are well aware of it.

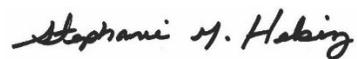
The Chamber has heard from property owners, businesses themselves, and residents who have been caught up in these terrifying rallies, sometimes unable to get away for hours because they are blocked in. This is a concern, just to grab dinner with their family or go to a movie on a Friday or Saturday night. I shouldn’t have to spell it out for this body that all it takes is once, and people will simply stop going out. COVID recovery has been slower for Silver Spring than other areas in Maryland, and this is one more deterrent that is impacting our business community and their ability to keep their doors open.

This situation, however, can be addressed and this proposed legislation by Delegate Lehman does just that. It is past time that this issue was met head on with punishments suitable for the crime, rather than a seeming “invitation” to bring your nefarious activities to Maryland. Our hardworking, and understaffed, police departments need additional tools to hold participants accountable. Until they get them, it is clear that this type of activity will continue and that residents will have to worry about where they are going when, and business will have to continue to wonder if tonight is the night no one shows up to their establishment or, worse yet, a meet up takes place and there is an injury or fatality on or near their place of business.

In summation, the Chamber wants all businesses to succeed. And we believe that this legislation will help assure a safe and welcoming environment for everyone, which is key to a thriving business community, a thriving Silver Spring, and a thriving Maryland. Safe for those who live here, who work here, and who come here to enjoy the wonderful amenities we have to offer, thus allowing Silver Spring to take its rightful place as a business and residential hub, and economic engine, in Maryland.

Should you have questions, don't hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,



Stephanie Helsing
President & CEO