

**DATE:** March 20, 2025

**BILL NO.:** Senate Bill 4

**TITLE:** Economic Development – West North Avenue Development Authority - Alterations

**COMMITTEE:** House Ways and Means Committee

### **Letter of Support**

#### **Description of Bill:**

Senate Bill 4 makes a number of changes to the powers, duties, and composition of the West North Avenue Development Authority, establishes the authority as an instrumentality of the state, and makes the authority permanent.

#### **Background and Analysis:**

The West North Avenue Development Authority (WNADA) was established by the General Assembly in 2021 for the purpose of developing revitalization strategies for the target area in Baltimore City. The Secretary of Housing and Community Development is a board member of WNADA. Originally, statutory provisions related to WNADA were set to terminate in September 2026. As originally established, WNADA had authority and powers similar to a stakeholder commission, but, in practice (and as originally intended, as articulated by the Office of the Attorney General in 2022), the entity has acted as an economic development authority, which distributes \$15 million annually in grants intended for projects that support development in the target area. The authority submitted its Comprehensive Plan, aimed at advancing community development by promoting strategies and opportunities that enhance housing, mobility, and economic opportunity in this area, in January of 2024.

Since its formation, WNADA has helped bring significant resources into the North Avenue corridor in West Baltimore, which has suffered from decades of disinvestment and decay. These resources fund efforts such as rehabilitating vacant homes and replacing abandoned lots with residential and commercial development, bringing residents and jobs into these neighborhoods and expanding the city's tax base while prioritizing the most vulnerable members of the community.

Senate Bill 4 expands and clarifies WNADA's powers and duties, and, importantly, exempts WNADA from certain taxation and assessments in some circumstances. It also establishes the West North Avenue Development Authority Fund as a special, non-lapsing fund. These provisions will help the authority become self-sufficient in future years, decreasing the need for state budget expenditure. Making the authority a permanent entity also ensures that it will be able to implement its Comprehensive Plan for these neighborhoods.

#### **DHCD Position**

The Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development respectfully requests a **favorable** report on SB 4.