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WRITTEN TESTIMONY

Senate Bill 987 (SB987) – Racing and Community Development Act of 2020

Senate Budget & Taxation Committee February 25, 2020

SUPPORT

Background: SB987 lays out a vision for a redesigned and rebuilt Pimlico Race Course that offers modernized facilities for the Preakness, as well as ways to use the property year-round — athletic fields in the infield; spaces for community meetings, arts festivals, concerts and banquets; and parcels for mixed-use commercial, retail and residential development, such as a supermarket, family and senior housing, office space and more. The plan is the result of extensive negotiations by city leaders, the owners of the Maryland Jockey Club, and horse racing industry stakeholders.

Written Comments: The Pimlico Race Course property sits at the gateway to the Park Heights community. A year ago, when the General Assembly debated the future of the Preakness in Baltimore, northwest Baltimore community stakeholders were genuinely concerned that the Preakness would be leaving its longtime Pimlico home and the 149-year-old racetrack property would become vacant. The effects of that would have been devastating to the City of Baltimore, and especially to the Park Heights community.

Today, we enthusiastically support the package to redevelop the Pimlico Race Course Property, ensuring the historic Preakness Stakes stays in Baltimore. The Pimlico redevelopment plan creates the kind of momentum that is critical for strengthening Park Heights. Over the course of decades, CHAI has invested in Park Heights, owing and operating apartment buildings for seniors, investing in maintaining and developing housing stock and working side by side with Park Heights Renaissance, LifeBridge Health and other partners through the Northwest Baltimore Partnership to create opportunities to build value in Park Heights. We believe that the investment in the Pimlico Race Course property will be leveraged to attract redevelopment and reinvestment across the community, reinforcing and adding energy to efforts already in the works, and resulting in a benefit to all residents of Park Heights.



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To that end, we have worked through a collaborative process involving a variety of stakeholders including neighborhood residents and representatives from community associations, nonprofit organizations, faith-based institutions, the business community and local and state government to develop a Pimlico Redevelopment Community Compact. With the proximity to the Pimlico Race Course property, community interests are integrally entwined with the future of this site. We believe that the overall success of the Pimlico redevelopment will be determined in whether and how it serves to lift up the entire Park Heights community, including supporting neighborhood-level community development.

The Community Compact provides for the establishment of a community advisory board, with notice and opportunity for the Board to have input on each step of the development process. This will ensure that the redevelopment aligns with community interests, providing benefit to the community beyond the Pimlico Race Course property borders. The Compact anticipates addressing issues such as traffic, noise and safety that may arise as a result of increased racing days at Pimlico during the Laurel Park construction. And finally, the Compact calls on Baltimore City to work collaboratively with the community advisory board to address community development issues such as jobs, housing, safety, traffic, lighting, green space and urban design across all neighborhoods of Park Heights. The Compact's signatories include the elected officials, Park Heights Renaissance, CHAI, LifeBridge Health and neighborhood association presidents from across Park Heights, and we have assurance it will be signed by the City of Baltimore.

We believe that the Pimlico redevelopment will provide community benefit by way of its beautification and utilization of the site, the confidence and hope inspired by virtue of the investment in this marquee property, the addition of recreational facilities that will be available for use by the community, and through the infrastructure improvements to be made. And we believe in the critical importance of leveraging this pivotal opportunity to invest in the whole community. SB987, when combined with the Community Compact, will serve to meet these goals.

Accordingly, CHAI urges a favorable report on SB987.

