

February 19, 2020

The Honorable Kumar Barve
Chairman, House Environment and Transportation Committee
House Office Building, Room 251
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Opposition of House Bill 614 (State Government - Office of the Environmental and Natural Resources Ombudsman - Establishment (Environmental Accountability and Transparency Act))

Dear Chairman Barve:

The Maryland Building Industry Association (MBIA), representing 100,000 employees of the building industry across the State of Maryland, opposes House Bill 614 (State Government - Office of the Environmental and Natural Resources Ombudsman - Establishment (Environmental Accountability and Transparency Act)).

This measure establishes an Office of the Environmental and Natural Resources Ombudsman, giving the Ombudsman authority to analyze environmental and natural resource-related data and process complaints involving suspected environmental and natural resources violations.

While we appreciate the intent of this bill to enforce environmental violations, creating a new office and paying for the appointment and salary of the Ombudsman will be an expensive endeavor. The State already has the Department of Natural Resources and its police force to protect our natural resources; at a time when Maryland is heavily investing in other significant programs, creating a redundant office is simply not fiscally responsible.

Furthermore, this measure opens the door to everyday citizens to contact the Office of Environmental and Natural Resources for anything they think may be in violation of environmental regulations. These laws are complex and the parties involved are already heavily regulated, which insures against violations. At best, well-intentioned citizens will tie up valuable State resources with unfounded complaints. At worst, malicious actors will use this opportunity to slow down valuable and legal projects.

For these reasons, MBIA respectfully requests the Committee give this measure an unfavorable report. Thank you for your consideration.

For more information about this position, please contact Lori Graf at 410-800-7327 or lgraf@marylandbuilders.org.

cc: House Environment and Transportation Committee Members