

**Statement by Citizens Against Beltway Expansion (CABE)
in Support of House Bill 717
Public Information Act – Required Denials – Distribution Lists
For a Hearing by the
House Health and Government and Operations Committee
February 11, 2020**

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Citizens Against Beltway Expansion (CABE) appreciates the opportunity to express our support for House Bill 717. Over the last two years, CABE members have been dismayed by this administration's broken promises and lack of transparency regarding the massive and controversial P3 proposal to add private toll lanes to I-495 and I-270. One important broken promise is over the question of whether any homes would be taken to make way for this project. Ahead of the 2018 election, Governor Hogan promised that no homes would be taken. These promises were taken in good faith by many Montgomery County voters.

But since that time, the administration has indicated that 34 homes and two businesses would be taken. It is alarming that the State Highway Administration (SHA) has sent letters to more than 3,700 residents along I-495 and I-270 stating that SHA would need to access their property in order to conduct survey work in advance of the widening project. The large number of letters sent raises concerns that the number of homes at risk of taking may be more than 34 and that there may be substantial impacts on many other homes that would not be taken. We are confused that SHA would send letters to residents along sections of I-495 which the Board of Public Works has not authorized the Department of Transportation to move forward with solicitation of bids.

It is also alarming that the State has refused a request by a member of the Maryland General Assembly for a list of the residents who received the letter. It appears that in denying the request, SHA is hewing to an interpretation of the Maryland Public Information Act which does not reflect the purpose of a 2018 revision to that law. It appears that SHA is again withholding critical information that would shed light on its scope and impact on communities all along the two highways. Given this failure of transparency, the Maryland General Assembly must revise the Public Information Act to ensure that this administration nor any other can stand behind the law, stretching its' meaning, in order to hide important information.

CABE urges the Committee to report House Bill 717 favorably. Thank you for considering our views.