



POSITION STATEMENT

TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE HOUSE BILL 1395 -- PUBLIC SAFETY – PERSISTENT AERIAL SURVEILLANCE

March 6, 2020

**DONALD C. FRY
PRESIDENT & CEO
GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE**

Position: Oppose

House Bill 1395 bans a unit or agency of the State or political subdivision from conducting persistent aerial surveillance to gather evidence or other information in a criminal investigation unless it is: (1) in accordance with a valid search warrant issued by a judge; (2) on a location for the purpose of executing an arrest warrant; (3) in fresh pursuit of a suspect; (4) to assist in an active search and rescue operation; (5) to locate an escaped prisoner; (6) if a law enforcement officer reasonably believes that the use of aircraft is necessary to prevent imminent: (i) serious bodily harm to an individual; or (ii) destruction of evidence; or (7) if the U.S. Department of Homeland Security determines that credible intelligence indicates that there is a high risk of terrorist attack.

The Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) strongly supports the aerial surveillance pilot program in Baltimore City. Improving public safety, the GBC contends, is the most important issue facing Baltimore City and one that needs to be urgently addressed. Crime, especially homicides and shootings, overshadows Baltimore City's positive attributes and diminishes its economic potential.

A comprehensive, data-driven and evidence-based methodology is essential to achieve sustained crime reduction in Baltimore City. That is why the GBC believes that the Baltimore Police Department should be afforded the opportunity to utilize all available tools and resources to bring down the unacceptable crime rate. The Laura and John Arnold Foundation, a subsidiary of Arnold Ventures, has recently offered to fund a program to provide aerial surveillance technology for a period of three years, at no cost to Baltimore City. The program would provide an additional investigative tool that could be used by the police department and prosecutors to bring perpetrators of crime to justice.

While the use of aerial surveillance has proven useful in military and national security applications, it has not yet been used as a law enforcement tool in American cities. The aerial surveillance pilot program should be allowed to proceed to its "proof of concept" stage of initial implementation and evaluation without the limitations proposed in House Bill 1395. Given the current level of violent crime, it seems reasonable that a new technology offered as an added public safety investigative tool at no cost to Baltimore City should be tried for the benefit of all citizens.

The GBC's 2020 *Legislative Priorities* states, "violent crime and public safety concerns threaten the health, well-being, and economic prosperity of our communities. Persistent violent crime rates in Baltimore City require strategic action by state and city officials." House Bill 1395 is inconsistent with this priority by essentially banning the opportunity for Baltimore City to implement an aerial surveillance pilot program that has the potential to improve the ability to fight, deter, and prosecute perpetrators of crime.

For these reasons, the Greater Baltimore Committee urges an unfavorable report on House Bill 1395.

The Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) is a non-partisan, independent, regional business advocacy organization comprised of hundreds of businesses -- large, medium and small -- educational institutions, nonprofit organizations and foundations located in Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Harford, and Howard counties as well as Baltimore City. The GBC is a 65-year-old, private-sector membership organization with a rich legacy of working with government to find solutions to problems that negatively affect our competitiveness and viability.

GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE

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