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Testimony before the Maryland General Assembly
House Environment and Transportation Committee
March 16, 2021 - 1:30 p.m.

HB0980– Public Ethics Definition of Application

UNFAVORABLE

Good afternoon, my name is Tamara Davis Brown, a resident of Clinton, Maryland. I serve as Chairman of the Legislative Committee of my chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. as well as chairman of the Legislative Agenda Committee of the Maryland statewide Legislative Agenda Committee. I am writing on behalf of myself and the 176 members of my chapter, the majority of whom reside in the 23rd, 25th, 26th (where I live) and 27th legislative districts in the County. Our chapter serves the Ft. Washington and surrounding southern Prince George’s County areas.

I am writing/testifying in Opposition to HB0980, a bill to modify the definition of “Application” concerning the Public Ethics law in Prince George’s County, MD.

This **LATE-FILED** bill literally caught the Prince George’s County Council with their pants down! Community members opposed this bill during the Delegation’s deliberation of it because it disingenuously framed the bill to simply allow its Countywide Zoning Rewrite proposal to be advanced after years of work and millions of dollars spent.

What happened you may wonder? Developers filed the requisite campaign contribution Affidavits in that Zoning Rewrite Proposal indicating that they had made campaign contributions to so many County Council members that the Council could not met a quorum to have a previously scheduled Joint Public Meeting with its Planning Board. **SHAMEFUL!**

Why are residents still OPPOSING this bill? Permitting the definition of **Application** to be changed to include Countywide Sectional Map Amendments would have the unintended consequences of allowing all those developers to “upzone” their property during the Zoning Rewrite **WITHOUT** going through the normal zoning process established under the County’s ordinance, which includes an application, public hearing and evidentiary hearing before a Zoning Hearing Examiner, all designed to allow transparency and public input into the rezoning process.

The County Council knew about this issue for months (March 2020 when the Joint Public Hearing was originally scheduled) and did absolutely nothing to rectify the problem (i.e., remove all developer applications for upzoning as part of the Zoning Rewrite or disclose the received contributions and return the money). Now, the Prince George’s County Council has come to you saying this bill is the only way to resolve this issue. **IT IS NOT!**

If anything, lawmakers should limit the scope of developers’ dollars and contributions to the very body that decides their applications to avoid even the “appearance of evil.” Surely, these non-

resident developers are not donating out of the kindness of their hearts, but to influence the very applications they have before the County/District Council.

Therefore, I urge this Committee to vote UNFAVORABLY on this bill and OPPOSE it! Enough is enough, and the County should learn from past ETHICS errors.

Thank you for your consideration.

I am registered to speak in OPPOSITION to this bill, but may be unavailable to do so once the bill is called as I am working. Please accept my apologies in advance if I am not available.