

March 4, 2022

Del. Kumar Barve, Chair

Environment and Transportation Committee

Maryland House of Delegates

Dear Del. Barve:

I am a Resident of the 26th Legislative District (Fort Washington) and am writing in opposition to HB1057 (PG406-22) that has been voted into the Environment and Transportation Committee by the PG Delegation. HB 1057 will be heard on March 8, 2022 at 1pm and I am submitting this as written testimony for that hearing.

As you know, **HB 1057** will eliminate the Recreation Department as we know it in Prince George's County and create a "quasi private" Recreation Authority to be managed under the County's authority. I am deeply concerned about the threat of dismantling M-NCPPC, a nationally recognized Parks and Recreation Department to create an organization in its place that will be: 1) less effective than M-NCPPC, 2) focused on only one special interest group's needs, 3) not based on best practices in parks and recreation and 4) hastily and surreptitiously created with little hope for long term sustainable success.

Here are my questions and concerns:

- This late filed bill was planned in advance since it had a video, website and witnesses. Why were M-NCPPC, the County Council and many delegates not briefed in advance? Why was the broader public not notified and only proponents of the Bill allowed/invited to testify?
- **PG-406-22/HB1057** has no provisions regarding public meeting or any community engagement. How will this be handled? The testimony was biased in favor of the Recreation Authority so what will ensure that the interests of people satisfied with M-NCPPC will be incorporated?
- The stated or implied expectation is that all or much of the current \$0.078 property tax rate will be transferred to the new Recreation Authority. These funds are currently used to run the community centers and recreation programs. Will property tax increases be necessary to fund the expansion of Youth Sports?
- While this bill increases services to the elite athlete, what programs and services to individuals with disabilities, seniors, youth, and the broader community will need to be eliminated to fund this special interest group's needs?
- What are the impacts to the current employees and retirees? It has been stated that nothing will change for them in terms of benefits but what studies have been done to evaluate HB1057's impact on the nearly 1200 Department employees and thousands of retirees?

- Why is the union (MCGEO) involved in such a major way when Recreation employees are not members of MCGEO with the exception of a small number of clerical (maybe 15) employees? Is the intent to make the Recreation Authority employees unionized? This would be an adverse impact for employees.
- The County Executive and County Council direct the work of the M-NCPPC, Department of Parks and Recreation through the Budget process and Planning Board. Where was the failure or break down of this system that necessitated such an intervention as this?

I have lived in Prince George's County since 1962. I attended public school in the County, graduated from University of Maryland-College Park, had a successful career in the County, and was married and raised my family here. I LOVE my life here in Prince George's. But that does not mean that I am satisfied with all aspects of living here. **We do not have sufficient shopping and dining opportunities, our County services sometimes fall short in meeting the timely needs of me and my neighbors, violent crime is on the rise, and we don't feel safe after dark. The County schools are underachieving and ranked near the lowest in the State.** Of all the areas needing elected officials' attention, the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission does not even make my Top Ten. This Gold Medal award-winning, nationally accredited Parks and Recreation Department is responsible for beautiful green and open space and a cleaner environment. For wellness opportunities, trails, classes and fitness areas. For a Park Police force that supports County law enforcement and makes communities safer. For Workforce Development and hiring the second largest number of young people (pre-covid) in the County. It is not a perfect organization, but the positives clearly outweigh the negatives and is not an organization in crisis as the emergency legislation suggests.

It is imperative that you review the impacts of this Bill and vote against it in Committee. The impacts of moving it forward will be felt beyond just the County. Nearly 2000 retirees/survivors/people on disability fear that their pensions will be adversely impacted by this Bill that is not well contemplated. Retirees live not only in the County, or in Maryland but all over the Country.

Please vote NO and allow this issue to come back to the County. There are other avenues available for the community and elected officials to address "failures" of the M-NCPPC, if they exist, that would include engaging the public in a well thought out, sustainable plan for the best of the future of Prince George's County.

I would appreciate a written response to this testimony. Thank you for your immediate attention to this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Emily Rose, M-NCPPC Retiree

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