

Dear Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

I strongly believe that HB 1057 is a recipe for disaster. The following are my reasons for objecting to this bill:

- Prince George's County already has one of the best recreation agencies in the country. The M-NCPPC Prince George's County Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) is the only six-time National Gold Medal Award winner for excellence in the field of park and recreation management in the nation. In addition, DPR has won numerous national, regional, and local prestigious awards. As these rewards demonstrate, DPR provides world class recreational services to the residents of the county.
- Why would anyone want to abolish a well-working agency that is run by top notch experts? Although M-NCPPC is not directly under the county government, practically, its work programs and budget are controlled by the county government. Any needed improvement or change can still be done as directed by the county government. To make improvements to better serve the county residents, there is absolutely no need for a new agency. Why ruin something good for the sake of creating "better", which most likely will end up being worse. We should not forget the saying "better is the enemy of good."
- Creating a new agency is always risky. Finding the right personnel to run the agency is the most difficult task. That is why the county government is talking about transferring the M-NCPPC staff to the new agency. So that they can use their expertise, which is most needed. This reminds me of the nightmare I personally went through in the early 2000s, when the county government established the Redevelopment Authority. In the mid-1990s, the County Executive Parris Glendening asked the M-NCPPC Prince George's County Planning Department to establish a Neighborhood Revitalization Division (NRD). NRD was established and created national award winning revitalization plans for underserved inner-Beltway communities. When Wayne Curry became the County Executive, he ordered the abolishment of this division and instead established a Redevelopment Authority (RA) to continue NRD's work. Since the county did not have the qualified staff to do the required work, they asked for the transfer of the M-NCPPC staff to RA. After painstaking negotiations, an MOU was signed, and over a dozen staff members were transferred to RA. I happened to be one of those staff members. Between 2000 and 2004, we worked for RA, but were treated like second class citizens by the county managers. As if this nightmare was not enough, in the fourth year, the county told M-NCPPC that it no longer wanted M-NCPPC staff but still needed M-NCPPC's financial support to run RA. The end result was us getting pink slips. M-NCPPC could not afford to keep us while still supporting RA. Thanks to the County Council who rescued us at the last minute. With the County Council's intervention, the deal between M-NCPPC and RA was renegotiated, and instead of an ongoing support, a one-time payment was given to RA and staff members who wanted to come back to M-

NCPPC were brought back. But in the meanwhile, several staff members found other jobs in other jurisdictions and left. A big loss for the county. This whole experience cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, if not millions. No "better" service was provided to the county residents. But I can say that lots of damage was done to some of the communities. Hundreds of families were displaced from their homes, beautiful and sturdy brick homes were demolished and a neighborhood we tried hard to revitalize had become and stayed a distressed area for more than a decade until flimsy new townhomes were built. My heart still goes to those displaced elderly people who lived in these homes almost all their lives and refused to go anywhere else. I am afraid the proposed Recreation Authority will replicate the Redevelopment Authority experience. But this time, instead of a dozen, hundreds of staff members will be affected. They will either be forced to go to the new agency, losing many benefits or quit or retire early. Is this the reward for their hard work over the years? Who can guarantee that the new agency will provide the same quality services for the residents of Prince George's County? How many families will be negatively impacted? And why, for what reason? Who will be the beneficiaries? Definitely, not me and my fellow retirees. Our pensions will more likely be cut and our benefit costs will increase. We will be the victims of this bill.

- Based on my 30 plus year experience, I can easily tell that there is only one reason behind this proposal: money. Look at the history, in the last 30 years, every new county executive attempted to abolish M-NCPPC. It is because of M-NCPPC's solid financial status due to being a well-run top notch entity. Every single time, the General Assembly refused M-NCPPC's abolishment, setting a precedent. The current County Executive proposed a creative way to get to M-NCPPC's revenues without repeating her predecessors' mistakes. With this proposed bill, the county government will be able to transfer M-NCPPC's monies to the county government. But, the end result of the removal of the recreation department will most likely be a reduction in quality of services at a greater cost to the taxpayers.

I urge you to consider the reasons mentioned above and act accordingly. The benefit of the general public, especially the underserved communities, should always be the number one priority. Secondly, the hardworking employees and retirees of M-NCPPC should not be penalized and put in financial hardship to fulfill the political agendas of county executives. We have already had enough of our share over the years by becoming victims of political agendas. In our golden years, it is our right to live a dignified life. We worked hard for decades under sometimes difficult conditions so that we could retire and obtain the wonderful benefits M-NCPPC provides. We retirees never expected that our retirement benefits would be jeopardized, and in our old age we would live in fear. This bill attempts to steal from the most vulnerable their future, security, and benefits.

Please do not waste our tax monies to make things worse. Any changes to improve the recreation services or the operations of DPR can still be authorized by the county

government without abolishing an excellent department. We do not need another less efficient and less effective new agency. We have already learned our lesson.

Please follow your predecessors who set a precedent and protected M-NCPPC from being ruined, and let the residents of Prince George's County continue to benefit from its superior recreational services. Please be sensitive to the needs of both the county residents and current and former M-NCPPC staff.

Please vote NO to HB 1057.

Respectfully,

Gül Güteryüz