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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
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**Testimony Regarding SB 557:
Baltimore County – West Baltimore County Redevelopment Authority
Before the Environment and Transportation Committee
April 5, 2022**

*“Revitalization (noun) – the process of making something grow, develop, or become successful again”
Cambridge Business English Dictionary, Cambridge University Press*

Good afternoon Chair Barve, members of the Environment and Transportation Committee.

If Baltimore County residents are to continue to enjoy a high quality of life, the County must be successful in its efforts to redevelop mature, older communities and local business districts. To spur investments into these communities the federal, state and local governments have created various programs /designations for which communities could qualify and be designated. These include, but are not limited to the Federal government’s HubZone program¹ and Opportunity Zones², the State’s Sustainable Communities program³ and the County’s Commercial Revitalization Program.⁴ Over the years “West Baltimore County”⁵ has had some areas qualify and been designated as HubZones, Opportunity Zones, Sustainable Communities, and Commercial Revitalization zones.⁶ Despite these designations, over the years, the County has not focused its resources in a manner to spur investment in West Baltimore County and has largely left these communities without the type of quality investment they deserve.

¹ The Federal HubZone Program – provided certification for preferred access to federal contracts to fuel the growth of small businesses in historically underutilized business zones.

² Opportunity Zones are designed to drive long-term capital into low-income communities across the nation, using tax incentives to encourage private investment into designated census tracts through privately- or publicly-managed investment funds.

³ The Sustainable Communities program – designed to encourage interagency and cross-governmental collaboration for financing programs and tax credit incentives

⁴ Woodlawn Commercial Revitalization – established a business investment area to offer a mix of office and light industrial space to support the Baltimore Washington Corridor and other federal facilities.

⁵ Under this legislation, “West Baltimore County” as defined as “the geographic area of Baltimore County within the boundary line of Liberty Road to the north, Baltimore National Pike to the south, Rolling Road to the west, and the line between Baltimore County and Baltimore City to the east along with all contiguous parcels for one block, except at the boundary line between Baltimore County and Baltimore City.”

⁶ See Appendix which contains maps of certain designated communities within the Western Baltimore County boundaries under SB 557.

Significant revitalization and redevelopment projects that have a successful result are generally driven by the private and public sectors working together with a unified vision for future economic and community development. Match this with a strong determination and shared desire to bring an entire project to reality and Baltimore County will be able to be all that it should be for its residents in the West Baltimore County designated area.

Some key anchors exist but need to be brought together with other factors to attract and maintain residents and businesses. Significant employers and employment opportunities are within West Baltimore County such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation Baltimore Field Office, Social Security Administration Headquarters, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services Headquarters, and many midsized and small businesses. Yet some of its commercial areas are, and have been for decades, under stress through age, deterioration, blight and flight. Thus far, Baltimore County has failed to bring together the public and private actors in a manner this community deserves. SB557 permits the County to focus in a way that it never has, and that will be more beneficial to western Baltimore County specifically and Baltimore County generally.

SB 557 authorizes (1) Baltimore County to exercise powers to acquire, develop or redevelop, and dispose of certain land or property located in West Baltimore County for commercial, or industrial or residential purposes and (2) the County Executive and County Council of Baltimore County to establish, by law, the West Baltimore County Redevelopment Authority and to delegate the powers indicated in SB 557 to the Authority. SB 557, as amended, does not request eminent domain authority.

Establishment of the West Baltimore County Redevelopment Authority as outlined in SB557 will provide the necessary structure to move forward. The Authority will then have a set of tools and authorizations to help spur a strong partnership between public and private entities, federal, state and local governmental agencies and the community at large in order to engage and act on the Authority's sole mission: to bring revitalization and development to the designated area in western Baltimore County.

For the aforementioned reasons, I ask that SB 557 be reported out favorably.