



Howard County Council

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District 4

SB0658

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Howard County Council, BWI Roundtable Representative from the Howard County Council

FAVORABLE

I am writing in support of SB0658, which will create the Maryland Aviation Infrastructure Impacts Commission. The Commission will be tasked with balancing BWI's growth plans against the damaging impacts of the airport's flight patterns and procedures on affected communities. I am a Howard County Councilmember and in my fourth year serving on the DC Metroplex BWI Community Roundtable. I serve on the Roundtable because I am acutely aware of our residents' frustration with loud, frequent, and low-flying airplanes to and from BWI. This proposed Commission will make recommendations to lawmakers about legislative solutions for these communities that are suffering from the physical and mental health consequences of prolonged noise exposure and other environmental impacts while bearing in mind BWI's economic vitality.

Prior to the adoption of the NextGen navigation system, airplanes followed patterns and procedures that dispersed the effect of their noise intensity, duration, and frequency over a wide geographic area. With the introduction of NextGen, air traffic has been funneled into a few narrow corridors stretching for miles away from airports creating a Superhighway in the Sky over neighborhoods in Howard, Anne Arundel, and Baltimore Counties. Planes can now fly at a lower altitude for a longer distance and closer together, resulting in excessive noise exposure, every day, 24/7. These communities have been poisoned by a technology that put efficiency before well-being.

For the past three years, the BWI Roundtable, the Howard County Council, and the Howard County Government along with our neighboring jurisdictions have tried to convince the FAA to adjust BWI's flight patterns and procedures in an effort to mitigate the excessive noise that residents experience. On December 20, 2019, a Bicameral Congressional letter was written to the FAA expressing concerns about the devastating impact on residents' quality of life. Below is an excerpt from that correspondence:

The FAA claims that other operational benefits such as increased safety have also been achieved, but, according to the report, this claim remains unsubstantiated because the "FAA has not established a process to measure or track these additional operational benefits because it states these benefits are difficult to quantify." It is also important to note that the FAA has yet to quantify the harm to health and property that the NextGen program has created for residents and wildlife living beneath concentrated flight paths.

We are concerned that the NextGen program has failed to meet the bare minimum standards for success. Currently, the FAA continues to introduce and implement concentrated flight procedures with Performance Based Navigation throughout the

country. The FAA boasts profits for airlines, shipping companies, and other industry stakeholders¹, but the burden of noise, health risks, and declining property values falls on the backs of hard-working Americans. We urge the FAA to fast-track the development of new flight paths in all Metroplexes and at other airports with NextGen procedures that will significantly disperse air traffic and raise aircraft altitudes.

To date, we have succeeded in initiating a health study of airplane noise on effected communities thanks to SB184 and HB310-2020. The results of the study are expected to be released later this Spring. The Roundtable's legislative committee was also successful in placing language in the FY2022 budget requiring the MAA to continue to provide technical expertise to the Roundtable and submit an annual report on those efforts. This action was necessary because the MAA and the Roundtable have divergent interests. The MAA is charged with growing the airport and the number of flights directed to BWI, while the Roundtable is concerned about balancing this growth with the health and welfare of the people on the ground beneath these flights. The MAA has been critical to establishing a relationship with the FAA that is now considering small changes to flight patterns and procedures, but other changes need to be made if the State is truly concerned about protecting residents' mental and physical health.

The Commission created by these bills will allow independent study, supported by data and science, to address the impact of NextGen on the tens of thousands of residents, including school children, who are living under the Superhighway in the Sky. Serious investigation is needed into the environmental injustice issues related to the Sky Highway and the poorest communities in the affected Counties.

On Monday night, the Howard County Council approved a Resolution supporting this legislation. All five Councilmembers in Howard County have many constituents who have begged us to resolve the misery of living under the Sky Highway. This Commission will help State lawmakers consider next steps in addressing our communities' concerns. The Commission will provide the legislators with data and expertise they can rely upon to fashion solutions to this problem.

Thank you for considering my testimony and the importance of these bills. In my role as the County Council's representative to the BWI Roundtable, I have a unique understanding of NextGen's impact and I hope this testimony will allow you to gain a deeper insight into what our communities are experiencing.

Sincerely,



¹ *"The Trade-off between Optimizing Flight Patterns and Human Health: A Case Study of Aircraft Noise in Queens, NY US"*