

— DESTINATION —  
*Southern Maryland*

March 31, 2022

To: Senate Finance Committee

From: Lucille W. Walker, Executive Director, Southern Maryland Heritage Area  
(Destination Southern Maryland)

RE: UNFAVORABLE Report for HB 1433 State Highways – Designation – Piscataway Highway

**It is with concern that we put in this written testimony regarding HB 1433. You will also have written testimony from Mr. Francis Gray, Chairman, Piscataway Conoy Tribal Council, urging an unfavorable report. We support his testimony, which includes the following:**

*"I am writing this letter in regards to House Bill (HB 1433) which proposes to rename Indian Head Highway to Piscataway Highway and is supported by several tribal members. As the Chairman of the Piscataway Conoy Tribal Council, the elected governing body of the Piscataway Conoy Tribe (PCT), one of three (3) Maryland State-recognized tribes, I would like to state that while it would be an honor to have recognition of our tribe's longstanding presence in the State of Maryland, the renaming of this highway has mixed support amongst our membership and Piscataway tribal community. While a portion of our members are offended by the term "Indian Head", which has become a popular cause in today's society, others are concerned that the name change will erase references to "Indian Headlands" a term which was used in historical records to identify the Southern Maryland region where our people resided. Additionally, some in our tribal community have voiced that they would rather not have the Piscataway name associated with Highway Route 210, which has seen a number of deaths in the past few years and has been named, arguably, one of the deadliest highways in the State of Maryland. These are all valid points of view that should be considered. Since there is no prevailing consensus in these varying opinions within our tribal community, it is very concerning that this bill was not fully vetted and that no outreach to Piscataway tribal leadership was attempted prior to HB 1433 being introduced.*

*In addition to this bill not being supported by the vast majority of Piscataway tribal citizens, it has been brought to the PCT Tribal Council's attention that a 2-year old online petition, "Change the name of Indian Head Highway and the Town of Indian Head" (Change.org) which in fact, was not started by the recognized Piscataway Conoy Tribe and cites a Piscataway tribal member and "15 others", which includes several high-level Maryland ....who may/may not be aware that they have been included on this petition and may potentially be assumed as supporters of it. This Change.org petition has been touted very heavily by the media as a reference for "overwhelming" support of HB 1433. Amongst the more than 4,000+ signers, it is noted that only a small fraction of those listed are actually Piscataway tribal members or Maryland residents. This fact is very troubling and should be of grave concern to lawmakers who will make a decision for Marylanders, potentially based on a concerted effort to misrepresent large support for a bill that includes those who do not have a vested interest in its passage.*

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*In closing, I would like to reiterate how recognition of the first people of Maryland and their historical homeland is a very honorable and prestigious acknowledgement. However, there are many voices that should be heard in the process, not just the loudest ones, and much careful deliberation needs to be done to ensure that this honor is bestowed appropriately. Unfortunately, the introduction of HB 1433 falls short of addressing the above concerns and therefore, we cannot support its passage at this time. As the duly elected representative body for the Piscataway Conoy Tribe, the PCT Tribal Council to-date has not been consulted at any time about this bill; however, this body has had, for several years, an ongoing government-to-government relationship with the State of Maryland and various other government entities, working on many Piscataway tribal-related matters with much success. We hope that this collaboration continues for years to come.” (From written testimony by Mr. Francis Gray)*

**We here at the Southern Maryland Heritage Area are a regional identity, and greatly honor the history and traditions of the First People of this region, the Piscataway. While this legislation was certainly meant as a positive action, a recognition, the concerns of the Tribal Chairman Gray, and others, are a concern for this organization.**

**We ask that you give this legislation a “pause” and reach out further to members of the Piscataway Conoy Tribe, particularly the Piscataway Conoy Tribal Council. Perhaps this legislation could be moved from implementation to a study, while further consideration is given to Tribal concerns.**

**We ask for an unfavorable report on HB 1433, at this time.**

**With appreciation,**



**Lucille W. Walker**

**Executive Director**

**Destination Southern Maryland**