



The Town of Washington Grove
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Via Electronic Mail

February 14, 2023

Maryland House Economic Matters Committee
C.T. Wilson, Chair
Brian Crosby, Vice Chair

Re: In Support of House Bill 459 (Kaufman)
County and Municipal Street Lighting Investment Act.

The Town of Washington Grove (TWG) is a small municipality in Montgomery County, Maryland. Washington Grove is on the National Register of Historic Places and our lighting is included as a Historic Associated Feature in the National Register Historic District Listing.

On our own initiative, the streetlights in Washington Grove have been converted to LED bulbs supplied by the Town, with the cooperation of Pepco who the streetlight fixtures. The result of this conversion has been a substantial reduction in the use of electricity and a 75% reduction in the Town's lighting bill.

Alarmingly, the "Multi-Year Plan" filed by Pepco in October of 2020 with the Public Service Commission included provisions that the Town interpreted as potentially threatening to continuation of our historic streetlighting aesthetics and to the cost savings from our proactive conversion to LED bulbs. The PSC rejected the filing in June of 2021, but directed Pepco to continue discussions with municipalities regarding customer options, including to purchase and maintain their own streetlights.

Washington Grove has been an active participant in the ensuing discussions with Pepco. However, while some progress has been achieved in defining a fair process and equitable requirements for municipal purchase or replacement of streetlights, it has become clear that resolution of important

issues in the public interest is unlikely to occur without further direction from the General Assembly

In particular, guidance is required to ensure that utilities cannot condition the sale of existing lights nor the installation of new municipally owned lights on the payment of excessive and unjustified fees, unnecessary procedures, or threats to the continuation of the right to attach to poles.

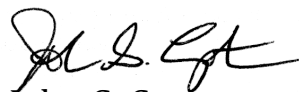
Experience in several New England states demonstrates that communities can benefit substantially by owning their streetlights. Since Massachusetts revised its law in 1988, nearly 120 communities have purchased their lights, including large cities including Boston, Fall River, New Bedford, and small towns such as Royalston with 70 lights. These municipalities are experiencing substantial savings. As well, these municipalities have realized a substantial improvement in street lighting service by employing their own maintenance contractors.

Yet in our region, Washington D.C. is the only jurisdiction that has been able to purchase all their overhead streetlights from Pepco.

Although Section 1309 of the Local Government Article established the right of Maryland municipalities to purchase existing streetlights, Pepco's unnecessary fees and procedures have made such purchase uneconomic and impractical. Further, the PSC mandated discussions have demonstrated that without legislative clarification of the details of municipal rights and the authority of the PSC, very little progress will be made.

I speak for the Town of Washington Grove and its residents in recommending passage of HB 459. The present bill goes a long way towards removing the impediments currently preventing municipalities from achieving the goals of Section 1309 in a way that improves lighting, saves electricity, and reduces local taxpayer expense. Washington Grove is prepared to work with the Bill's sponsors and other interested municipalities and counties to ensure that its provisions achieve these worthy goals.

Respectfully submitted,



John G. Compton
Mayor, Town of Washington Grove