



## **LETTER OF INFORMATION**

**Bill:** HB 778 – Montgomery Bicounty Agencies – Commissioners Discipline, Disclosures, Training and Ethics (105-23)

**Contact:** Debra Borden, General Counsel  
Jordan Baucum Colbert, Government Affairs Liaison

**Date:** March 30, 2023

**Re:** Letter of Information

Dear Chair Brian J. Feldman and Vice Chair Cheryl C. Kagan,

The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (the “Commission”) has taken no position on this bill. However, the Commission respectfully requests that the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee consider this information and include it in the record.

### **What the Bill Does**

This bill, as amended, authorizes the Montgomery County Commissioners, and Commissioner Applicants, to submit certain financial statements to the Montgomery County Council electronically. This bill prohibits a commissioner from soliciting or accepting from any person or entity with business before the Planning Board any financial contribution for any political candidate, political organization, or ballot question. It also prohibits a commissioner from soliciting any person with business before the Commission for an endorsement of, or opposition to, a political candidate. This bill as amended requires the Planning Board to report to the members of the Montgomery County Delegation on regulatory matters over which the Board has decision-making authority, including the ability of the Board to provide summaries of the substance of applications; information on required findings; information on any community concerns received by the Commission; and information on additional written testimony received by the Commission after the deadline for public testimony. The ability to perform various requirements shall be reported to the Montgomery County Delegation on or before December 31, 2023.

This bill also requires a commissioner to successfully complete appropriate training on Maryland Public Ethics Law and Commission policies on practices on ethics, drug and alcohol-free workplace and workplace harassment and intimidation within the first three months following appointment.

## I.

### **Trust and Transparency**

The Commission was established in 1927 to provide regional long-range planning, park acquisition and development. The Commission consists of two planning boards, one for Montgomery County and one for Prince George's County, comprised of five members each. Since its formation, the Commission has grown to become one of the most recognized leaders in land use planning, parks and recreation, all while achieving countless awards for innovation and stewardship. The Commission regularly evaluates its practices and is held responsible for its actions by elected officials in the counties it serves. The integrity of our mission to improve the well-being of over 2-million residents in both counties remains intact specifically because of the way the Commission is structured.

The Montgomery County Planning Board serves as citizen representatives for their communities in helping to plan, shape and maintain livable neighborhoods in the County. Under current law, five members of the Montgomery County Planning Board are appointed for staggered, four-year terms for no more than two full terms. Currently, the County Council appoints all of the board members, and the County Executive confirms the appointments.

In the past, when governance issues have arisen, the County Council has taken necessary steps to ensure the Montgomery County Planning Board operates effectively. If enacted, the Commission will continue to take necessary steps to ensure the integrity of the Planning Board. The Commission will also continue to provide timely information on regulatory matters over which the Board had decision-making authority as outlined within the bill.

## II.

### **Continuous Professional Development**

Awareness and understanding are integral to the Commission. To help our staff reduce exposure to business related risks, the Commission offers current programs and trainings in risk management, workplace safety and equal employment free from intimidation and harassment. In addition to risk management, workplace safety and equal employment, the Commission also offers equity, diversity and inclusion workshops and trainings for all employees to promote greater awareness, while utilizing effective strategies to improve cross-cultural communication. The Commission welcomes any effort to increase training and awareness by all stakeholders, including Commissioners, as that can only benefit the Commission as a whole.