

## **Mary Leigh Gough Harless Testimony on Senate Bill 183**

Good evening Chairman Guzzone and honorable members of the Budget and Taxation Committee. My name is Mary Leigh Gough Harless and I come before you to share my experience in relation to Senate Bill 183.

I am here as a concerned citizen who has personally faced challenges related to a road construction project in Leonardtown, Maryland, undertaken by Highway and Safety Services. I own a family farm that was rented to this construction contractor for the project.

The rental contract started on November 1, 2019, with the requirement of regular rent payments. Unfortunately, within the first year, these payments became sporadic. I notified Highway and Safety Services' project manager as well as the company owner Kyle McPhearson, MDOT personnel overseeing the project, and the bonding agency about my situation but it was all no help. My last payment of any kind was received on April 1, 2022. Despite the lack of payments, Highway and Safety Services' construction supervisor's trailer is still present on the property signifying an ongoing use of the property without the corresponding financial commitments.

Even though the money owed is undisputed, it has become necessary to hire an attorney and go to court several times. Despite the court having found in my favor, Highway and Safety Services has not paid me the over \$30,000 they owe in unpaid rent. I have another court hearing in February.

I had believed that I could rely on a contractor to the state, thinking that the State of Maryland would stand behind any obligations of a contractor. I trusted that the state would properly vet a business they hired to perform work for them. Regretfully, I have since come to learn that this contractor has a long legal history of not meeting their financial obligations and, despite these significant red flags, the State contracted with them anyway.

This situation has not only caused financial hardship for me and my family but has also raised serious concerns about the accountability of contractors that come into our community.

I understand the importance of infrastructure projects for our community's development, but it is equally crucial that property owners are treated fairly and compensated for the use of their land. I urge this committee to carefully consider the implications of Senate Bill 183 on situations like mine. It is essential that legislation ensures fair practices and provides avenues for redress in cases where contractual obligations are not met.

In conclusion, I appreciate the opportunity to share my story, and I hope my experience will contribute to the thoughtful consideration of Senate Bill 183. Thank you for your time and attention.