



OUR MISSION:

Working to enhance the economic prosperity of greater Silver Spring through robust promotion of our member businesses and unrelenting advocacy on their behalf.

February 20, 2024

The Honorable Marc Korman
and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee
House Office Building
6 Bladen St.
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chairperson, Korman and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Greater Silver Spring Chamber of Commerce, representing more than 300 employers, mostly small and minority owned businesses, in greater Silver Spring and surrounding areas in Montgomery County, we are submitting these comments of strong support for House Bill 1032 Highways – Tourist Area and Corridor Signage Program. We are convinced that this legislation will have a significant positive impact on the Silver Spring community as a whole, particularly those in the budding urban winery and brewing businesses. After all, it is hard to promote tourism, if no one knows where you are.

The Chamber has always been about making greater Silver Spring a thriving business community, a place where people want to live, work, and come to enjoy what so many of us love about Silver Spring – our wonderful arts and entertainment venues, our breweries, our “United Nations” of restaurants, and our outdoor gathering spaces. We believe that promoting commerce is the job of everyone in the state and codifying this law will ensure that the signage program is sustained, despite changes in leadership.

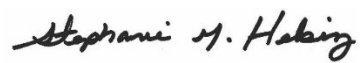
The Chamber has heard from businesses themselves, and residents who wonder why there is little to no signage promoting some of the unique offerings we have in Silver Spring. This is the case on Interstate 495, where the only signage for Exit 31, Georgia Ave, refers to Holy Cross Hospital and one sign about Wheaton Park, ironically with a golf symbol, which they don’t have, but nothing about gas, food, hotels, etc., as well as on the main arteries, Rte. 97 and 29, leading into downtown Silver Spring. The reality is, COVID recovery has been slower for Silver Spring than other areas in Maryland, and this lack of signage and overall visibility is one more deterrent that is impacting our business community and their ability to keep their doors open.

This situation, however, can begin to be addressed and this proposed legislation by Delegate Solomon does just that. It is past time that this signage program was revamped and made accessible to businesses. The Chamber would ideally like to see this be a state funded endeavor as originally intended, so as written presently, we urge that the cost “the administration considers appropriate (E)(3)(II)” to the business will indeed be within reason, realizing that the targeted industries for this program in Silver Spring are not large corporate entities, but in fact small businesses.

In summation, the Chamber wants all businesses to succeed. And we believe that this legislation begins to address the lack of visibility that has long plagued Silver Spring, which is ultimately the key to a thriving business community, a thriving Silver Spring, and a thriving Maryland. This is one more step that allows Silver Spring to take its rightful place as a business and residential hub, and economic engine in Maryland for those who live here, who work here, and who come here to enjoy the wonderful amenities we have to offer.

Should you have questions, don’t hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,



Stephanie Helsing
President & CEO