



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

SPONSOR TESTIMONY

**HB 6 - State Department of Assessments and Taxation and Department of General Services -  
Property Appraisal Aids - Geographic Images**

The Honorable Guy Guzzone, Chair  
Budget and Taxation Committee  
Maryland Senate  
3 West Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Chair Guzzone, Vice-Chair Rosapepe, and Esteemed Members of the Budget and Taxation Committee:

House Bill 6 aims to modernize, enhance, and standardize the property assessment process. The bill is a reintroduction that passed the House last year and again this year, enabling the State Department of Assessments and Taxation (SDAT) to use Geographic Information System (GIS) visualizations overlaid on oblique areal photography to assist its assessments statewide. The bill modernizes and standardizes the Department's menu of tools it uses to conduct property assessments.

**Mitigates Impacts to Counties from 2025 Budget:** The Budget as contemplated by the House requires Counties to pay more for teacher pensions, phases out grants to Counties to help teachers retire with appropriate compensation, mandates that Counties fully compensate individuals wrongfully incarcerated by the State, and makes Counties pay for 90% of SDAT's operating costs without giving any oversight or input. In other words, the General Assembly is asking Counties to take on more costs to balance the state budget without doing much to offset those costs or to give Counties any say on how that money is used.

As a result, the Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) predicts property tax hikes and service cuts which will impact vulnerable residents the most. Counties already fill in gaps created by the mismatch of statutory spending versus revenues, above and beyond their mandated local share under the Blueprint. The additional costs in this year's Budget will significantly impact local jurisdictions' ability to continue compensating for these gaps.

Counties must pay for 90% of SDAT's costs under the Budget, up from 50% under current law – roughly \$21.2 million in new annual costs. The General Assembly is proposing to shift State costs to Counties without giving them any say or oversight authority. SDAT would be mostly paid for by the Counties whose land it is assessing, thereby "placing assessment functions under the influence of local governments directly benefiting from property tax revenue — undermining public confidence in fair and impartial assessments" by "creat[ing] actual or perceived conflicts."

With all of this in mind, HB 6 becomes not just an important step towards taxation fairness and efficiency but an important source of funding to maintain the level of services provided by Counties and a reinforcement of the integrity and independence of an agency that determines the tax bill for every resident and business in Maryland.

*For reference, please see MACo's recent entries on its Conduit Street blog: [House Advances Budget Plan: Counties Block Some Cost Shifts but Face New Burdens – Conduit Street](#) and [Unfunded and Unwise: SDAT Cost Shift Reopens Old Warnings – Conduit Street](#)*

**Improved Accuracy and Efficiency in Assessments Leads to Increased Revenues:** Integrating GIS data and oblique areal photographic imagery into SDAT’s assessment practices is a simple step to modernize, standardize, and streamline Maryland’s property assessment processes. Currently, SDAT assessors must physically go to properties and conduct assessments when they have questions about changes to a given property that could impact values. The upgrade leverages common technology already utilized by nine counties in Maryland<sup>1</sup> to increase SDAT’s effectiveness and accuracy statewide.

**Cost Sharing is Worth the Investment for Counties:** The bill requires Counties and the City of Baltimore to collectively reimburse the State for costs up to \$1 million annually and requires a 50% split between the jurisdictions and the State for any costs over the first million annually. In turn, the total statewide assessable real property base would increase by up to \$1.25 billion—leading to \$1.4 million in increased revenues for the State and \$15 million to local jurisdictions annually.

**Addressing Staffing and Resource Challenges with Technological Improvements:** Like many state agencies, SDAT faces challenges in maintaining the large staff size necessary to carry out its mandate to conduct assessments of more than two million properties statewide once every three years. HB 6 shrinks the time and physical labor required for assessments while increasing accuracy and reducing errors, bringing in more revenue and allowing SDAT’s assessors to focus on more complex valuation tasks.

**Greater Privacy:** HB 6 would enable the use of common technology to assess properties accurately and quickly. This contrasts with the current impracticable physical assessment process that requires SDAT personnel to visit individual properties to complete assessments. This assessment process reduces physical intrusions and minimizes the need for assessors to physically enter private property. Oblique aerial photography is a specific, technical term, and technicians can only capture images at certain angles which must be used only for assessment purposes. These images are taken from too far away and at too severe an angle to capture any detail inside buildings, ensuring that the privacy of Maryland citizens is protected.

*Figure 1- example from a vendor, EagleView: <https://www.eagleview.com/>*



**Building on Existing Success:** Many counties in Maryland already use oblique aerial photography to conduct property assessments with great success. The major change this legislation brings is that the State will partner directly with all jurisdictions to implement oblique aerial photography bringing greater coordination and consistency.

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick, Harford, Montgomery, Howard, Prince George’s, Calvert, Wicomico, Anne Arundel, and Baltimore City

House Bill 6 modernizes our property assessment processes, making it consistent across jurisdictions, giving our assessors the tools they need to perform their duties more effectively, minimizing physical intrusions onto private properties, and allowing local jurisdictions and the State to increase revenues while addressing the Department's operational challenges and staffing issues.

For these reasons, I urge your support for House Bill 6 and respectfully request a favorable report.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kris Fair". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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Delegate Kris Fair  
District 3, Frederick County