

February 25, 2025

The Honorable Luke Clippinger
Chair, Judiciary Committee
101 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Letter of Information– House Bill 954 – Public Safety – State and Local Governments – Use of Unmanned Aircraft

Dear Chair Clippinger and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) takes no position on House Bill 954 and offers the following information for the Committee's consideration.

HB 954 provides that certain evidence obtained through the use of an unmanned aircraft is inadmissible in a criminal, civil, or administrative proceeding. Further, the bill prohibits a unit of State government or a political subdivision of the State from deploying or operating an unmanned aircraft subject to certain exceptions and prohibits a unit of State government or a political subdivision of the State from using certain information acquired using an unmanned aircraft.

The State Highway Administration (SHA) uses drones for several non-law enforcement purposes, including crash reconstruction, site investigations, design aid, condition assessments of assets (bridges, pipes, etc.), environmental studies, construction programs, and geotechnical analysis. Aerial photographs are a common tool in investigations, surveys, safety, and site management. If passed, this bill would prohibit SHA's ability to manage and survey critical infrastructure across the State as the prohibition can be interpreted to apply beyond use by law enforcement.

SHA received a USDOT Strengthening Mobility and Revolutionizing Transportation (SMART) grant award for \$1.6 million to pilot drone technology for real-time traffic analysis. SHA also received FHWA State Transportation Innovation Council (STIC) funds for \$80,000 to perform a Tethered Drones for an Enhanced Situational Awareness pilot to study enhanced incident management with drones. Prohibiting drone use would require SHA to forfeit these federal funds.

The Maryland Department of Transportation respectfully requests that the Committee consider this information when House Bill 954.

Respectfully submitted,

April King
Director of Government Affairs
State Highway Administration
410-210-5780

Matthew Mickler
Director of Government Affairs
Maryland Department of Transportation
410-865-1090