



Wes Moore | Governor
Aruna Miller | Lt. Governor
Harry Coker, Jr. | Acting Secretary of Commerce

DATE: February 25, 2025
BILL NO: House Bill 954
BILL TITLE: Public Safety - State and Local Governments - Use of Unmanned Aircraft
COMMITTEE: House Judiciary
POSITION: Oppose

The Maryland Department of Commerce (Commerce) opposes House Bill 954 – Public Safety - State and Local Governments - Use of Unmanned Aircraft.

Bill Summary:

House Bill 954 prohibits a unit of State government or political subdivision from utilizing an unmanned aircraft for surveillance, evidence collection, or any other purpose unless they have a warrant, performing search and rescue, are in fresh pursuit or to locate an escaped prisoner. An exemption is also provided if the Department of Homeland Security has determined the use of unmanned aircraft is necessary to counter a credible terrorist threat. The legislation also makes inadmissible any evidence collected through these means for the purposes of any criminal, civil, or administrative proceeding.

Background:

For decades Maryland has been at the leading edge in developing, testing, and introducing unmanned and autonomous systems (UAS), and is home to a robust and rapidly growing ecosystem of developers in unmanned vehicles, artificial intelligence, and robotics. With a highly skilled workforce, unique supply chain, and an unparalleled concentration of federal, academic, and corporate customers, Maryland is the perfect launchpad for the next generation of autonomous systems. Researchers here at the University of Maryland are leading the way in this field with applications across a wide variety of potential applications including disaster resilience, agriculture, search and rescue, and public safety and security.

Rationale:

While House Bill 954 would not have a direct impact on private citizens or companies, it sends a message to Maryland residents and the business community that unmanned aircraft are being used for nefarious purposes and the technology is something to be feared when the opposite is true. Laws and regulations are in place to ensure UAS are being used properly and safely. Additional restrictions such as these proposed through House Bill 954 prohibit public safety professionals and first responders from using these technological advancements to create efficiencies and improve safety outcomes.

In order to grow Maryland's economy, Commerce is concentrating efforts and resources in industry sectors we believe hold the greatest potential for growth and therefore return on the State's investment. The growing advanced air mobility industry is one such industry which

presents opportunities for Marylanders, including employment, business investment, strengthened public safety services, and equitable access to services in urban and rural communities. But for the industry to flourish, we need to draw attention to the legal and beneficial uses of the technology, not further restricting and criminalizing already illegal activity.

Commerce respectfully requests an unfavorable report on House Bill 954.