

SB 883

Economic Development – Maryland Stadium Authority

Carroll Park Soccer Stadium and Facility

In the Senate - Hearing 3/05 at 1:00 p.m.

Position: Opposed

I am writing to respectfully urge an unfavorable decision on Senate Bill 883, which would authorize the Maryland Stadium Authority (MSA) to acquire land, design, construct, and finance a new professional soccer stadium and academy facility in Carroll Park. The legislation permits the issuance of up to \$216.6 million in state-backed bonds, creating substantial long-term financial exposure for Maryland taxpayers without adequate safeguards.

Stadium financing has a well-documented history of revenue volatility, yet SB 883 contains no protections against cost overruns, no requirements that private partners share financial risk, and no mechanisms to prevent taxpayers from covering bond shortfalls. Because MSA bonds rely on the State's credit, Marylanders would ultimately bear the consequences if revenue projections do not materialize--something none of us can afford.

Additionally, SB 883 grants MSA broad authority to "acquire by certain means" the land at Carroll Park. This raises significant equity and community-control concerns for West and Southwest Baltimore. The bill does not require community benefit agreements, environmental justice assessments, or binding local oversight—leaving residents without a guaranteed voice in decisions that directly affect their neighborhoods and parkland.

The bill also diverts a large share of Maryland's limited bonding capacity toward a single stadium project at a time when the State is confronting major budget constraints and possible cuts to essential services, including programs under the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA), where hundreds of individuals with disabilities are at risk of losing vital support and care. With critical human services under threat, it is difficult to justify committing hundreds of millions of public dollars to an entertainment venue rather than community-driven, high-impact needs such as housing, infrastructure, schools, and disability supports. The example of DDA is just one of many this budget season.

SB 883 establishes a Carroll Park Soccer Stadium and Facility Fund, which is exempt from normal requirements that interest earned on State funds return to the General Fund and redirects sports wagering proceeds into a project-specific silo. This reduces transparency, weakens fiscal oversight, and sets a troubling precedent of carving out special financial treatment for individual development projects.

Furthermore, the legislation offers no evidence-based plan for job creation. Without independent economic analysis, local hiring guarantees, or small-business participation requirements, the bill provides no assurance that promised economic benefits—often overstated with stadium projects—will materialize for Baltimore residents.

The neighborhood of Pigtown has a rich history and our community shouldn't just have our voices trampled over like they mean nothing. The residents of Pigtown have time and time again voiced our strong opposition to having our public parks destroyed for commercial, private purposes that seek to make money off our community instead of building us up. The audacity to hear our voices and ignore them is jarring. This commercial deal should have been made between private properties so as to

utilize pre-existing unused industrial environments to avoid paving over the historic greenery and wildlife that exists in Carroll Park. This also would have avoided the issue of needing to utilize taxpayer money in state bonds in order to pay for a billionaire to line his pockets.

Finally, there are serious concerns about traffic, transportation, and road capacity in the Carroll Park area. Existing surveys and assessments have not adequately accounted for the congestion, road wear, neighborhood disruption, and safety challenges that a high-volume sports facility would introduce. If these issues are not fully evaluated and addressed before authorizing major construction, the surrounding communities will bear the burden.

For all these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to oppose SB 883. Maryland's limited resources—especially amid current fiscal pressures—should prioritize essential public services and community-centered investments, not a high-risk stadium proposal lacking transparency, accountability, and demonstrated public benefit.

Thank you for your consideration.

Rice Rodriguez

Resident of Pigtown