



- Washington County Government
- City of Hagerstown
- Hagerstown Community College
- Washington Co. Free Library
- Town of Williamsport
- The Greater Hagerstown Committee, Inc.
- Hagerstown-Washington Co. Chamber of Commerce
- Visit Hagerstown (Local Convention & Visitor's Bureau)
- CHIEF (Hagerstown-Washington Co. Industrial Foundation)

Washington County Community Coalition Lobbyist: John Favazza, Esquire Mannis Canning & Associate. 410.263.7882 jfavazza@maniscanning.com

February 13, 2026

The Honorable Guy J. Guzzone
Chairman, Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
Miller Senate Office Building, 3 West Wing
11 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

Ref; Senate Bill 0497 *Property Tax - City of Hagerstown and the Hagerstown Multi-Use Sports and Events Facility, Inc. - Exemption*

Dear Senator Guzzone,

On behalf of the Washington County Community Coalition (WCCC), I write to express our unanimous and unequivocal support for Senate Bill 0497.

Formed in 2005, the WCCC advocates before the Maryland General Assembly on matters of critical importance to Washington County. The Coalition advances legislation only when it has unanimous approval from its partners, reflecting broad alignment across local government, education, economic development, tourism, and business leadership. Our partners include Washington County Government, the City of Hagerstown, Hagerstown Community College, the Washington County Library System, the Town of Williamsport, the Town of Smithsburg, Visit Hagerstown (Convention & Visitors Bureau), the Washington County Chamber of Commerce, CHIEF (Washington County Industrial Foundation), and the Greater Hagerstown Committee.

Senate Bill 0497 is essential to ensuring the long-term operational viability of two transformative downtown investments: the Hagerstown Fieldhouse and the Hagerstown Multi-use Sports and Entertainment Center (Meritus Park). These facilities were developed to serve dual purposes — providing high-quality public recreational and entertainment opportunities while acting as economic engines for downtown revitalization.

Since opening, both facilities have generated measurable positive impacts. They have increased downtown foot traffic and tourism, strengthened small business activity, stimulated reinvestment in previously vacant and underutilized properties, and created accessible employment opportunities within walking distance for low-income neighborhoods. These projects are functioning as intended: as anchors that catalyze private investment and expand tourism-related economic activity.

However, their financial models operate on narrow margins typical of public-oriented sports and event venues. The imposition of property taxes would materially impair their ability to break-even operationally, undermining both fiscal sustainability and the broader economic development returns these projects are designed to produce. Without the requested exemption, the long-term viability of these facilities would be placed at significant risk—effectively negating the substantial public and private investment already made.

Senate Bill 0497 represents a prudent and strategic policy decision that protects existing investments, preserves jobs, sustains downtown revitalization momentum, and ensures continued access to recreational and entertainment opportunities for our community.

The Washington County Community Coalition respectfully urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 0497.

Sincerely,

Paul Frey, *Managing Partner for The Washington County Community Coalition*