

Supporting Testimony
for
Maryland Senate Bill 318
State Capital Program – Covered Projects –
Public Engagement and Community Outreach Requirements and Community
Engagement and Outreach Act of 2026

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Maryland General Assembly
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

Dear Chair and Committee Members,

Many of us in Catonsville are grateful that Senator Brooks is submitting this bill for your consideration. We appreciate his willingness to listen to his constituents and take action to fix what became clear to all of us is a broken system. I strongly support this bill.

The impetus behind this bill stems directly from the widespread disappointment among Catonsville neighbors regarding the lack of insight into a recently proposed communications tower for the Patapsco State Park Hilton Area. While the gap coverage is a valid safety need, almost universally folks felt surprised and frustrated that the State wasn't more forthcoming about their multi-year long planning effort. In fact, it wasn't until neighbors noticed ribbons on trees (likely to mark them for removal) before we were even aware something was being planned for the area. There were no signs posted explaining the plans nor when a public hearing would be held. There were no flyers, no emails, no notice to the neighboring HOAs, no notice in the local papers, nor posts on local social media. The State eventually held a meeting in another county that we heard about just in time only after filing a request under the Maryland Public Information Act.

Finally, after the three or four of us who attended the meeting realized the severity of the impact to the community, we worked to get the word out to our neighbors. We started a letter writing campaign to our elected officials. We printed off flyers and hand

delivered to hundreds of homes. We painstakingly built email lists. We posted on social media. Eventually, we heard Senator Brooks would host a meeting for the community to hear (again) from the State Planners. Once again, we delivered flyers, sent emails, and posted on social media to alert neighbors about the meeting. This time the meeting was standing room only with more than 100 folks in Catonsville. The lack of engagement up to this point was just plain infuriating. It wasn't appropriate. It wasn't professional. It wasn't neighborly.

Prior to the first meeting when we reached out to the State Planners and asked among other things if there was an appeals process. Their response implied that since the project was to be done by the State on State land, they would not have an appeals process and further they noted that they would not need to follow local zoning regulations. At the first meeting the handful of us learned that the tower would be nearly 348' (that's nearly 35 stories tall), was to be built less than 80' from the roadside with barbed wire fencing and less than 1000' from residential properties. They did however share the results of the balloon visibility tests they conducted to see how widely the proposed 348' tower could be potentially seen throughout Catonsville. The Tower would clearly effect hundreds and hundreds of home and park visitors. They knew that it would likely be problematic, which may have influenced their decision to provide limited notice about the public meeting, the choice of venue located outside town, and waited until the plans were final. They didn't bother to properly develop alternatives. It felt arrogant and bullying.

I understand the State Planners were probably working hard and just trying to do the right thing, but their judgement was off. That's why we need laws, rules, and regulations, so that we are all accountable and we know our left and right limits. As we learned through this experience, we cannot just assume that someone would do the right thing. We need to expect it, because we require it. It shouldn't be this hard to simply know what is going on in our neighborhood with our tax dollars.

Please approve this bill so future Maryland residents can be afforded simple courtesies. Transparency doesn't mean the State has to make everyone happy, but they should do the right thing and to include being good neighbors.

Sincerely,

Kathleen A. Bogner

Sincerely yours,

Kathleen A Bogner