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February 18, 2026

The Honorable Guy Guzzone  
Chair, Budget & Taxation Committee  
3 West Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

***Re: Letter of Information – Senate Bill 459 – Procurement – Advertising – Local News Organizations (Local Newspapers for Maryland Communities Act of 2026)***

Dear Chair Guzzone and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) takes no position on Senate Bill 459 but provides the following information for the Committee’s consideration.

SB 459 would require MDOT to structure procurement procedures to achieve an overall goal of 50% of the total dollar value of procurement contracts for print or digital advertising made directly to local news organizations.

MDOT rarely makes direct media buys for print or digital advertising because media buys are a pass-through expense in most MDOT advertising/marketing contracts. These digital media buys are made using Spotify, Facebook, Clear Channel, etc., which are not often Maryland-based firms. This bill would have a significant impact on digital advertising if pass-through media buys were subject to its requirements, as the digital advertising services that are the most effective, provide the most engagement, reach the most customers, and provide the best return on investment would no longer be options due to the “local” restriction. Additionally, many local news organizations utilize subscription-based paywalls, which can limit audience reach and constrain access to advertising placed on their sites.

SB 459 would require the Department to spend more overall dollars to ensure its messaging reaches the intended audiences; and those audiences who do not regularly consume information from local news organizations will not receive the message at all. This is especially true for the Maryland Port Administration and Maryland Aviation Administration, which are often targeting audiences from outside of Maryland and across the globe to compete with other U.S. ports and airports to bring additional business and economic growth to our state. Restrictions to “local media” may limit Baltimore/Washington International Thurgood Marshall’s and the Port of Baltimore’s ability to target customers beyond Maryland.

Additionally, the Motor Vehicle Administration’s (MVA) Maryland Highway Safety Office (MHSO) invests over two million dollars in paid media each Federal Fiscal Year using funding

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from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) grant program. Through MHSO's media and marketing contractor, which has office space and employees based in Maryland, the MHSO carefully researches and selects paid media tactics and platforms to effectively deliver safe-driving messages statewide using its NHTSA grant funding. These messaging campaigns leverage a mix of paywall-free digital platforms, including social media networks, local radio, television, and billboard advertising, ensuring broad visibility and reach to target audiences. These campaigns are an important tool in reaching Vision Zero, the goal of zero deaths and serious injuries on Maryland's roadways by 2030. A diverse mix of media platforms is essential to ensuring these critical safety messages reach the entire population.

As noted, the Department does not currently issue procurements for advertising. If required to do so, MDOT would need to establish a procurement specific to advertising, which, given current procurement timelines, would not be in place by October 1, 2026. In addition, a stand-alone procurement of direct media costs may not be of interest to marketing agencies since it is primarily a direct cost pass-through and would create an unnecessary delay.

The Maryland Department of Transportation respectfully requests the Committee consider this information when deliberating Senate Bill 459.

Respectfully submitted,

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Maryland Department of Transportation  
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