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**HB 0179**

February 17, 2026

**TO:** Members of the Economic Matters Committee

**FROM:** Nina Themelis, Director of Mayor's Office of Government Relations

**RE:** House Bill HB 179 Department of Commerce - Complaint Portal and Annual Report

**POSITION: LETTER OF INFORMATION**

Chair Valderrama, Vice Chair Charkoudian and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **has concerns with** House Bill (HB) 179.

HB 179 requires the Department of Commerce to create a portal for residents to file complaints if certain government documents are not issued within 60 days. They may not file a complaint if the law or regulation allows for a longer period of time than 60 days. The Department would then make an annual report to the House and Senate of all the anonymized complaints.

The Baltimore City Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) regularly processes over 40,000 permits a year. We work diligently across agencies to get through reviews in a timely manner. The length between application and final approval depends greatly on the nature of the permit and the scope of work. There are several steps in the permitting process including application review, processing, approval, payment and inspections. For many applicants, depending on the nature of the permit, the processing duration can be same day or between 24 and 48 Hours. However, more complex permits can take much longer and are subject to a variety of factors that often fall outside of one agency's control - such as subsequent partner agency review. Additionally, some applications are delayed because applicants have failed to provide a complete application or to correct information. However, most permits are typically processed in less than 60 days.

HB 179 could cause confusion among residents utilizing the complaint portal as there is no requirement within the legislation for the Department of Commerce to forward complaints to the corresponding governmental unit for resolution or to perform any action other than aggregating the information into an annual report. Oftentimes when an individual is submitting a complaint, there is an expectation that there is a resultant action taken within a reasonable amount of time to resolve that complaint. Additionally, if residents are utilizing the Department of Commerce complaint portal under the assumption that an action will be taken, they may not utilize their local

jurisdiction's complaint process which could cause further dismay with the permitting process altogether. Finally, there is no validation mechanism available to the Department of Commerce to ensure that the information being provided is comprehensive and accurate and no requirement for the Department of Commerce to engage with the responsible government unit to confirm information shared within the portal.

The City of Baltimore has a local complaint process whereby residents may submit a complaint through the 311 portal if a permit's issuance is taking an extended period of time. Those complaints are then immediately assigned to the agency responsible for issuing said permit to work with the applicant to resolve the matter.

Local jurisdictions all have unique and distinct processes and software for reviewing permit applications and addressing customer complaints. We consistently work collaboratively with applicants and partner agencies to ensure permits receive the appropriate Zoning, Site Plan and Preliminary Code Review, prior to the issuance of a permit. The BCA does not believe that this legislation would provide an outcome that would be beneficial to reducing permitting timelines and providing the appropriate data to produce those outcomes.

For these reasons, the BCA respectfully requests **consideration of the above information** on HB 179.