

Oppose Senate Bill 1005

Maryland–National Capital Park and Planning Commission General Counsel and Powers of Local Planning Boards – Alterations

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan, and Committee Members,

I respectfully urge the Committee to report unfavorably on Senate Bill 1005.

I have worked on a range of environmental, transportation, public health, land use, and good government issues in Montgomery County and more recently in Prince George's County since 1990. Since July 2018, I have testified before the Prince George's County Planning Board and the District Council many times, on multiple land cases and on proposed legislation. I have been a party to multiple legal challenges to Planning Board and Council decisions. In 2021, I helped coordinate a grassroots campaign by civic, environmental, good government, and justice organizations to block legislation that would have gutted important State Ethics Law provisions that apply to zoning and land use in Prince George's County.

No Transparency and No Serious Public Discussion on the Prince George's County Side

SB 1005 could have profound fiscal and operational impacts on the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, on its subsidiary agencies, and its employees, and on their ability to carry out the Commission's vital mission. Planning, zoning and land use decisions can and often do have profound, wide-ranging, and long-lasting impacts on communities, public health, the environment, public services and infrastructure, local businesses, family finances, and our ability to address climate change.

Yet there has been essentially *no* transparency in Prince George's County around this late-filed, consequential bill. Despite being fairly aware of General Assembly legislation, I learned about SB 1005 only late last week and only through a blog post.

As far as I know, *no* Prince George's County agency has published an analysis of SB 1005's potential fiscal and operational impacts. The only impacts analysis I have seen is the attached draft outline developed by the Montgomery County Planning Board, which concisely lays out numerous impacts and apparently legitimate concerns.

Likewise, I don't know of *any* serious public discussion in Prince George's County regarding the purposes of and potential impacts of SB 1005. Instead, with *less than 15 hours notice*, the County Planning Board convened a "emergency meeting" on the morning of March 20, where it voted five to zero support SB 1005. That meeting lasted *seven* minutes. Two members had been appointed only last Wednesday, *less than 48 hours* before voting to support such a consequential bill. A third member was appointed only last November. There were *no* substantive discussion or questions, other than Commissioner Geraldo expressing general concern about potential impacts on merit employees and retirees.

Here is the link to that March 20 meeting: [PG Planning Board March 20 Emergency Meeting](#)

Tellingly, on March 16, ten former members of the Prince George's County Planning Board, including four former chairs and two former vice-chairs, sent to the leaders of the Prince George's County and Montgomery County Senate and House Delegations the attached letter detailing why SB 1005 should be rejected. It is highly likely that any one of those ten former Planning Board members has more experience than four of the Planning Board's five current members combined. However capable our current Planning Board members may be, the numerous concerns raised by those ten former Planning Board members, by the Montgomery County Planning Board, and other parties should be given serious consideration.

To be clear, there are many ways that the practices and decisions of M-NCPPC and its agencies can and should be improved, but identifying and implementing those reforms require serious analysis and discussion, transparency, and public participation. Unfortunately, SB 1005 and the process by which it has been fast-tracked provide none of that. Our communities and our public employees deserve better.

I urge you to issue an unfavorable report.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and public service.

Sincerely,

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March 16, 2026

Delivery Via Email Only

The Honorable Julie Palakovich Carr, Chair
Montgomery County House
Lowe House Office Building, Room 202
6 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Benjamin F. Kramer, Chair
Montgomery County Senate Delegation
Miller Senate Office Building, Room 401
11 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Ronald L. Watson, Chair
Prince George's County Senate Delegation
James Senate Office Building, Room 121
11 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Nicole A. Williams, Chair
Prince George's County House Delegation
Lowe House Office Building, Room 207
6 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Why SB 1005 (Maryland–National Capital Park and Planning Commission General Counsel and Powers of Local Planning Boards – Alterations) Is A Very Bad Idea

Dear Bi-County Leadership:

As former members of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (“Commission”) who also served as members of the Commission’s Prince George’s County Planning Board, we write today with one voice. Together, the undersigned cohort spans more than 50 years of Commission stewardship and well over a century of combined public service devoted to the residents of Prince George’s County.

For the reasons discussed below, we join with our colleagues serving now on the [Commission’s Montgomery County Planning Board](#) to unequivocally oppose the General Assembly’s consideration of SB 1005, *Maryland–National Capital Park and Planning Commission General Counsel and Powers of Local Planning Boards – Alterations*. The Prince George’s County Planning Board has not yet voted on a position for the bill.

The bill proposes a shocking reorganization of the Commission by chopping up most of its core administrative functions, creating a duplicative bureaucracy that would cost the taxpayers in the bi-county jurisdictions millions of dollars in the process. The agency’s CORPORATE departments include Legal, Human Resources, Finance, Corporate Policy, Risk Management and the Inspector General’s office that guards against fraud, waste and abuse. At a minimum, SB 1005 would create havoc within a national and local award-winning agency that has served the residents in Prince George’s County and our region with national distinction for nearly a century.

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The Commission currently operates with a business model that is designed to take excellent care of the operations in each county by leveraging specialized expertise. For example, a team of lawyers experienced in land use is assigned to each county planning staff, but they collaborate and cover for each other when staffing issues arise. Meanwhile, their supervision is coordinated and other bi-county (centralized) legal teams are specialized in construction contracts, human resources, litigation, etc. This hybrid model works exceptionally well and was praised by both the Prince George's and Montgomery County Councils in their joint study several years ago. Other Commission functions are organized in a comparable fashion – recruitment, information technology and a scandal-free procurement process, for example. It makes no sense to sever the functions as proposed by the bill. Duplicating them would be a huge step in the wrong direction that will result in nothing more than waste.

We also believe you must consider the best interest of more than 5,000 people who are currently depending on the Commission's unified pension system, including almost 2,000 retirees, beneficiaries or individuals who are disabled. Destroying the agency's cohesive structure that currently serves the entire agency will cost county taxpayers more money by disrupting the actuarial balance and fiduciary responsibilities that made the system successful to date.

In summary, SB 1005 represents a misguided attempt to fix something that isn't broken. We challenge you to identify another county government or agency in our region bestowed with more regional or national accolades or awards – awards in planning, parks and recreation, government budgeting, financial reporting, human resources as well as courtroom results. Please let us know. This 100-year-old agency has been a consistent nationwide leader supported by administrative teams with hard-working people who are dedicated to our mission and the people we serve.

Your constituents deserve an unfavorable vote on SB 1005.

Sincerely,

Charles Dukes, Former Chair
Elizabeth M. Hewlett, Former Chair
Samuel J. Parker, Jr., Former Chair
John H. Rhoades, Former Chair
Dorothy F. Bailey, Former Vice-Chair
Howard W. Stone, Jr., Former Vice Chair
Sarah A. Cavitt, Former Member
Jesse Clark, Former Member
William M. Dorner, Former Member
A. Shuanise Washington, Former Member

cc: Members of the Prince George's and Montgomery County Delegations
President, M-NCPPC Retirees Association