

April 7, 2026

The Honorable Melissa Wells
Chair, Government, Labor, and Elections Committee
145 Lowe House 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 Wells 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 purchases are structured as pass-through expenses within existing advertising and marketing contracts to adhere to State procurement law. These buys are executed through established platforms that are selected specifically for their proven ability to deliver measurable results, broad reach, and cost efficiency regardless of the vendor’s geographic location. Subjecting these pass-through media buys to a local advertising requirement would significantly undermine MDOT’s ability to use the most effective digital advertising channels, ultimately reducing campaign performance, limiting audience engagement, and diminishing return on investment.

While it has been suggested that these advertising placements could instead be routed through local news organizations to satisfy the proposed requirements, this approach would add expenditures on top of existing contractual obligations with marketing agencies. In addition, many local news organizations operate behind subscription-based paywalls, which restrict audience access and reduce the visibility and effectiveness of advertising content. This limitation directly conflicts with MDOT’s need to reach the widest possible audience, particularly for public education and safety campaigns.

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 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.

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Existing contracts with marketing agencies include comprehensive market research, campaign messaging, graphics, video, and other aspects of creating successful marketing campaigns. Separating out the media buy itself from this process and adding in a complex double layer of procuring these buys may risk the underlying contract with existing media partners and limit the interest of future agency procurements as a result.

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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