

Letter of Support: HB 1141 – Municipal Incorporation – County Commissioners or County Council – Required Approval of Referendum Request

TO: The Honorable Melissa Wells, Chair

FROM: David Owens, Member, City of Fort Washington Municipal Planning Committee

DATE: February 24, 2026

RE: SUPPORT of HB 141

Dear Chair Wells and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express strong **SUPPORT** for **HB 141**. As a current member of a resident-led effort to incorporate Fort Washington, MD, the current "veto power" held by statewide county councils over municipal planning decisions is an outdated hurdle to effective governance. This bill is not just about power; it is about efficiency, accountability, and the fiscal health of the entire State.

Our support for HB 141 is based on several critical factors:

1. Moving Beyond the "Zero-Sum" Mentality The current veto structure fosters a "zero-sum" mentality, suggesting that strong cities "take resources away from the county." In reality, the opposite is true: strong cities increase service capacity, strengthen county financial positions, and create "win-win" solutions. When municipalities are empowered to thrive, they drive up property values and business activity that benefit the entire County tax base.

2. Strategic Planning at the Local Level Municipalities provide targeted, strategic planning that large county governments—by their very scale—cannot perform as effectively. Local leaders understand the granular needs of a specific commercial corridor or residential block. When the County overrides these localized insights, it disrupts the "character" of the community and undermines the professional studies, such as our recent Henson Creek Village Area Study, that residents have already paid for.

3. Tangible Evidence of Taxpayer Value Municipalities provide the most tangible evidence of how taxpayer dollars are used. Because city services are immediate—trash pickup, local policing, and neighborhood parks—residents can see their investments at work. Strengthening municipal authority ensures that these highly visible and efficient service providers have the power to protect the community assets they manage.

4. Increased Accountability and Citizen Activation Cities are naturally closer to their citizens. This proximity creates a robust accountability framework and activates civic participation. Residents are far more likely to engage with a local mayor than a county-wide council member.

By removing the County veto, you ensure that the officials held most accountable by the people are the ones making the final decisions.

5. Demystifying Public Budgets Large county budgets can be opaque and difficult for the average citizen to navigate. Managing a smaller "municipal checkbook" is easier for the public to monitor and understand. HB 141 helps demystify government spending by empowering the jurisdictions where residents can most clearly track their tax dollars from the point of collection to the point of service.

By passing HB 141, the General Assembly will ensure that municipalities are no longer treated as subordinates, but as the specialized, accountable, and fiscally responsible partners they are. I urge a **FAVORABLE** report on this legislation.

Sincerely,

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The following Committee Members and Community Members support this effort as well:

Robert Bailey, Accokeek, Maryland
Gelicia Washington, Clinton, MD
Henrieta Dzurikaninova, Fort Washington, MD.
Tamara Davis Brown, Clinton, MD