

ANDREA FLETCHER HARRISON
Legislative District 24
Prince George's County

Appropriations Committee
Vice Chair, Racing and Sports
Facilities Subcommittee



The Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street, Room 207
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3919
800-492-7122 Ext. 3919
AndreaFletcher.Harrison@house.maryland.gov

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Written Testimony – HB 636 – Public Ethics – Members of the General Assembly – State
and Local Government Employment Exemption**

February 24, 2026

Good afternoon, Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, and members of the Government, Labor, and Elections Committee.

For the record, I am Delegate Andrea Fletcher Harrison, and I am pleased to present HB 636, Public Ethics – Members of the General Assembly – State and Local Government Employment Exemption. Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in support of this important legislation. Today I rise not to weaken ethical standards, but to strengthen fairness, consistency, and common sense within our ethics framework.

For seven years, I have had the honor of serving in the Maryland General Assembly. During that time, I have seen firsthand the dedication, sacrifice, and financial realities faced by those who choose public service. This bill addresses a narrow but significant issue: an inconsistency in current law that allows an individual to hold a State or local government position if they obtained it before election but restricts that same opportunity if it is pursued after serving honorably for a full term. The same job, in the same agency, with the same qualifications, may be permissible if held before election, but questionable if sought after service, solely because of timing.

Under existing General Provisions § 5–514(a), members, candidates, and members–elect are generally prohibited from receiving earned income from an executive unit or a political subdivision, with limited exceptions for merit system positions, human services roles, educational instruction, and certain preexisting relationships. HB 636 preserves that structure and those safeguards, but adds a narrow, reasonable exemption for a transaction or relationship that an individual enters after having served at least one full elected term in the General Assembly, so long as the individual has objectively satisfied the minimum education, licensure, and experience requirements for the position.

In other words, this bill does not create automatic employment; it creates a fair opportunity to compete. The individual must have completed one full elected term. The position must have clear, objective qualifications. The individual must independently meet those qualifications, just like any other applicant, and existing ethics, conflict of interest, procurement, and lobbying restrictions remain fully in place. This is not a shortcut, not patronage, and not a revolving door. It is a modest correction so that ethics standards are based on conduct, conflicts, and qualifications, not simply the date on a résumé.

It is important to remember who serves in the Maryland General Assembly. We are small business owners, attorneys and educators, nonprofit leaders, public safety professionals, community advocates, working parents, and caregivers, and even former legislators from other bodies of government. I, myself, served 10 years as a county councilmember and six years as staff prior to that. Yet, I am disqualified from obtaining employment in any form of government inside of our great state, simply because I held an elected position. However, if I had been a regular employee at the time I filed for this office, I still could have maintained that employment. While qualified for many positions in government, I have been prohibited, even as much as working for a private entity that pulls building permits so I would not appear that I am using my influence as a legislator when all I want to do is earn a decent living.

Many members maintain outside employment because legislative compensation alone does not support a family in today's economy, and most of us accept personal financial sacrifice to serve. For members who are not independently wealthy, other employment is not optional; it is necessary.

HB 636 maintains strong ethics protection. It does not repeal the general prohibition on earned income from executive units and political subdivisions. It does not eliminate the Joint Ethics Committee's authority to review and exempt certain situations, nor does it alter conflict of interest laws, procurement safeguards, or lobbying restrictions. It simply clarifies that, after completing a full term, more than a 12 or 18 month "cooling off" period, a member may seek employment with the State or a political subdivision when they meet objective minimum education, licensure, and experience requirements, and when that employment is obtained through established processes, such as merit system hiring. Ethics should prevent corruption, not opportunity.

If public service becomes a career dead end, where serving in the General Assembly permanently complicates access to employment for which an individual is uniquely qualified, we might discourage exactly the kind of people we want to attract.

Finally, HB 636 restores a basic sense of logic and fairness. If someone can ethically hold a particular State or local government job prior to becoming elected, subject to all existing safeguards, then becoming a legislator should not, by itself, make that job off limits forever. The risk of corruption does not turn on whether employment was obtained before or after election; it turns on whether laws regarding conflicts, transparency, and undue influence are followed. This bill ensures that our ethics code continues to protect the public interest while recognizing the realities of public service and the need for fair, merit-based opportunities while serving.

For these reasons, I respectfully ask for a favorable report on HB 636. Thank you, and I am happy to answer any questions.