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SB290

February 5, 2026

TO: Members of Judicial Proceedings and Budget and Taxation Committees

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

RE: Senate Bill 290 - Baltimore City - Ordinance Enforcement - Amount of Fines and Penalties

POSITION: Favorable

Chairs Guzzone and Smith, Vice Chairs Rosepepe and Waldstreicher, and Members of the Committees, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** Senate Bill (SB) 290.

SB 290 would amend Section (48) of Article II of the Baltimore City Charter to increase the maximum amount that Baltimore City is authorized to establish for civil and criminal fines and penalties for violating certain ordinances, rules or regulations from \$1,000 to \$5,000. This adjustment would provide the City with an essential tool to deter and punish illegal dumping and other offenses that harm public safety, community well-being, and drain City resources.

The current maximum threshold for civil and criminal fines and penalties was set in 1982 and has not been adjusted since that time. During the 2024 Maryland General Assembly Session, legislation was passed that increased a similar maximum threshold for Charter Counties from \$1,000 to \$5,000. This legislation would merely provide Baltimore City with the same ability to impose penalties as these Charter Counties.

To illustrate the importance of this maximum threshold, the City has a major issue with individuals who are dumping materials in the City illegally. The Baltimore City Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) responds to over 15,000 311 complaints of illegal dumping each year, each one requiring an investigator to respond and investigate, then costing Baltimore taxpayers millions of dollars in cleanup. While we maintain a proactive illegal dumping camera campaign, which can lead to prosecution, DHCD also utilizes its citation authority to try and curb this behavior. Our involvement with this issue over the years shows us that people illegally dump out of convenience, but also in an effort to save money. The current maximum penalty of \$1000 does not serve as a sufficient deterrent.

While significantly higher fines may risk lower initial collection rates, increasing the cap to \$5,000 would allow the City to increase those citations currently charged at a value lower than \$1,000 to a value between the current and the new cap. Using 2024 citation numbers for fines under the environmental citation umbrella, we assume that 58% of citations are collected. Assuming that fines classed under environmental citations such as illegal dumping, failure to abate an unsafe structure, or even unleashed dogs are increased to a \$5,000 cap, there is a potential revenue increase of \$18.04 million annually. The Baltimore City Police Department also issues fines for criminal charges. Although these fines are not a primary revenue driver, the City may see an increase in these collections if Senate Bill 290 is enacted.

The current \$1,000 cap is insufficient to address the severity of certain other offenses beyond illegal dumping, for example: Failure to Obtain License to Operate a Rental Dwelling, Illegal Signage Posting and Unlicensed Street Vending. Increasing the cap in the Charter would also not automatically increase the fine and penalty amounts. Given that many of our fines and penalties are a part of a graduated system, this cap that was set over 40 years ago is not only preventing the City from providing significant behavioral deterrents but is also preventing the City from applying appropriate penalties for lower-level violations as well. If the legislation is adopted, the BCA will review individual fines to determine what, if any, adjustments will be proposed to the City Council for consideration.

For these reasons, the BCA respectfully request a **favorable** report on SB290.