

SB290-JPR-BT-FAV .pdf

Uploaded by: Nina Themelis

Position: FAV



BRANDON M. SCOTT
MAYOR

*Office of Government Relations
88 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401*

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.

SB 290 - Favorable.pdf

Uploaded by: Shamoyia Gardiner

Position: FAV

ZEKE COHEN
Council President



100 Holiday Street, Suite 400
Baltimore, Maryland 21202
410-396-4804 • Fax 410-539-0647
council.president@baltimorecity.gov

BALTIMORE CITY COUNCIL

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21202

February 5, 2026

Honorable Chairs Smith and Guzzone and members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings and Budget & Taxation committees,

I write to you in support of Senate Bill 290, Baltimore City – Ordinance Enforcement – Amount of Fines and Penalties.

In these tough fiscal and financial times, the local autonomy of Baltimore City to levy and collect fees is vital. This legislation would increase, from \$1,000 to \$5,000, the cap on any criminal or civil fine or penalty Baltimore City can levy for violating its laws.

The bill offers more autonomy and revenue generation capacity, thereby better situating the Mayor and City Council to generate revenue not directly reliant upon the state.

As the sponsor of local legislation aligned with this bill, **I urge the committee to vote favorably on this bill.** Please contact my office with any further questions.

CC: Shamoyia Gardiner, Deputy Chief of Staff and Legislative Director

CLC Testimony SB 290. 2.3.26.pdf

Uploaded by: Shana Roth-Gormley

Position: FAV



SB 290

Baltimore City – Ordinance Enforcement – Amount of Fines and Penalties

Hearing before the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

Feb. 5, 2026

POSITION: Favorable

Community Law Center (CLC) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, which is a legal partner to Maryland neighborhoods and nonprofits in pursuit of more just and vibrant communities. CLC provides direct legal representation to communities and nonprofits on issues like tax exemption and organizational governance, real estate, contracts, intellectual property, employment law, and more. We advocate on issues that impact our Maryland neighborhood and nonprofit clients, including nuisance and vacant properties.

CLC supports SB 290 to address nuisance and vacant properties in Baltimore City. SB 290 will increase to \$5,000 the maximum amount that Baltimore City may impose as a fine or penalty for violating certain ordinances, rules, or regulations. If passed, SB 290 will allow Baltimore City to impose this higher fine on property citations like Failure to Abate a Vacant Building Notice, to incentivize property owners in Baltimore City to address and rehab their vacant and nuisance properties. Baltimore City needs every tool in the toolbox to address vacant and nuisance properties, including higher fines. If a property owner fails to clean up their deteriorating property, or of a property owner has abandoned their property, or passed away and their heirs have not taken ownership, the mounting citations and fines on the property will eventually make the property eligible for in rem judicial foreclosure, a process authorized by Maryland state law to allow for the City to foreclose on vacant properties whose taxes, citations, and other liens exceed the property's assessed value. After the foreclosure, the City as the new owner can then take control of the property, stabilize and maintain it, and transfer it to a new owner who can return it to productive use. Giving Baltimore City greater latitude in how to address property violations, including allowing the imposition of higher fines, is one step toward that goal.

CLC supports SB 290. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

For the above reasons,

CLC urges a FAVORABLE VOTE ON SB 290.

Please contact Shana Roth-Gormley, Staff Attorney at Community Law Center, with any questions: ShanaR@communitylaw.org | 410-366-0922

SB 290 Baltimore City Fines.pdf

Uploaded by: cailey locklair

Position: UNF

MARYLAND RETAILERS ALLIANCE

The Voice of Retailing in Maryland



SB 290 Baltimore City- Ordinance Enforcement- Amount of Fines and Penalties

February 5th, 2026

Position: Unfavorable

Written Testimony: While the intent of SB 290 may be to encourage compliance, this proposal would have serious unintended consequences and is unlikely to improve outcomes for residents or businesses.

Baltimore City is distinct from many other jurisdictions because it already permits criminal charges to be filed for conduct that is also subject to civil enforcement. As a result, individuals and businesses may face both civil penalties and criminal prosecution for the same underlying violation. In this context, increasing civil fines fivefold does not simply enhance enforcement — it significantly compounds punitive exposure.

This layered enforcement structure warrants caution, not escalation. A \$5,000 civil fine, combined with the possibility of criminal charges, court involvement, and long-term collateral consequences, creates penalties that are disproportionate to the nature of many violations, which are often administrative, technical, or non-violent.

Higher fines also do not reliably improve compliance. Experience and research show that excessive penalties frequently lead to increased litigation, delayed remediation, and the accumulation of legal debt rather than faster correction. For small businesses, nonprofits, and residents operating on thin margins, even a \$1,000 fine can be destabilizing; a \$5,000 fine can be catastrophic, forcing closures or abandonment rather than compliance.

Escalating fines also risks shifting enforcement from a compliance-focused approach to one perceived as revenue-driven, which undermines public trust and disproportionately impacts vulnerable communities.

If the goal is improved compliance and safer conditions, there are more effective and equitable alternatives, including graduated enforcement, warnings, technical assistance, and reasonable payment options that prioritize correction over punishment.

For these reasons — particularly given Baltimore City’s existing authority to pursue criminal enforcement — increasing the maximum civil fine from \$1,000 to \$5,000 is excessive and counterproductive. We respectfully urge the committee to oppose this bill.

Thank you for your consideration and we urge an unfavorable report on SB290

MMHA - 2026 - SB290 - INFO.pdf

Uploaded by: Matthew Pipkin

Position: INFO



Senate Bill 290

Committee: Judicial Proceedings

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

Date: February 5th, 2026

Position: Informational

The Maryland Multi-Housing Association (MMHA) is a professional trade association established in 1996, whose members consist of owners and managers of more than 214,000 rental housing homes in over 1015 apartment communities. Our members house over 571,000 residents of the State of Maryland. MMHA also represents over 270 associate member companies who supply goods and services to the multi-housing industry.

Senate Bill 290 increases 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.

MMHA has historically opposed granting authority to local governments to increase the maximum amount from the original \$1,000 amount that was set prior to 2024. MMHA believes that reasonable fines serve as a necessary deterrent to bad actors, but there is a point where fines can become excessive and lead to unintended consequences. For our industry, this could lead to more evictions, as housing providers may be more inclined to find a resident in breach of lease if their conduct results in a \$5,000 fine that the property owner must pay. Further, such fines may lead to increased litigation and legal challenges, as individuals and business entities contest the fairness of the fines.

With that said, MMHA recognizes that with the passage of Senate Bill 522/2024¹ and Senate Bill 829/2025², Baltimore City remains the sole local body in the State that does not have the ability to set their maximum fines and fees up to the \$5,000 threshold. As SB 290 brings Baltimore City on equal footing with the rest of the State in this regard, MMHA will not oppose the legislation.

Assuming the passage of SB 290, MMHA would ask the Baltimore City Administration to carefully consider the potential impacts of fines, ensure fairness and proportionality in application, and explore alternative approaches to address undesirable behaviors without resorting to measures with unintended outcomes.

Please contact Matthew Pipkin, Jr. at (443) 995-4342 or mpipkin@mmhaonline.org with any questions.

¹ Maryland General Assembly. (2024). *Senate Bill 522: Charter counties—Enforcement of local laws* (2024 Regular Session). <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgawebsite/Legislation/Details/SB0522?ys=2024rs>

² Maryland General Assembly. (2025). *Senate Bill 820: Municipalities – Enforcement of ordinances and resolutions* (2025 Regular Session). <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgawebsite/Legislation/Details/SB0820/?ys=2025rs>