



## Howard County Citizens Association

*Since 1961...*

*The Voice Of The People of Howard County*

Date: 20 February 2019

Subject: **HCCA Testimony on Ho. Co. 12-19**

Good Evening. My name is Hiruy Hadgu and I am testifying on behalf of the Howard County Citizens Association (HCCA) in support of Ho. Co 12-19 to strengthen the public ethics laws concerning developer contributions.

It is no secret that Developers have an outsized influence in the County. So much so we see the public display of hand wrangling by elected officials on issues that affect all of us from Zoning Laws, Overdevelopment, and before you the school impact fees.

This bill proposed by Delegate Miller comes at a critical time. HCCA fully appreciates this initiative especially as a watchdog organization and only hopes the Delegation will vote in favor of this Bill as a means to begin to restore trust in our Government. We see the political dysfunction and the decay of our discourse at all levels of government. While corporate powers continue to flourish we continue to see this act driven by greed and complete disregard for the common good.

Section 5-853 in its current form has several loopholes. It allows for various exceptions under which legalized bribery can take place. While the existing provision allows for contributions by Developers, this bill repeals many of the exceptions and states, "An applicant who has a case before the County Council may not make a payment to an elected official." The HCCA considers this provision very strong and unequivocal. We think it can become even stronger if Section 5-853 (B) (2) (I) thru (IV) are removed from the Bill. Please refer to lines 24 thru 29 on page 5 and lines 1 thru 10 of page 6. We think these sections could provide a means for loopholes.

We urge the Delegation to support this bill. Some in the Delegation would lament the outsized corporate influence on our political process nationally. There is virtually no difference between the national corporate influence and what we experience locally. They have lobbyists and contribute money to lawmakers whenever they need favorable zoning and land-use decisions.

A very clear example of the potential local influence can be illustrated by the contributions made by the Erickson Living Management to the County Council, County Executive, and some Delegates. This entity has contributed to three of the five members of the County Council, both the former and present County Executive, and eight of the twelve Delegates. You can refer to the table below to view the specific donations accepted by the aforementioned elected officials. This is a perception of a conflict of interest. An example of the perception is the recent vote on CR3-2019 by the County Council which was to authorize the County Purchasing Agent to waive the formal competitive bidding requirements of Title 4, Subtitle 1 of the Howard County Code in order to enter into an agreement with River Hill Square, LLC, to make certain road improvements at the intersection of Clarksville Pike (MD Route 108) and Sheppard Lane. All three Councilmembers receiving contributions from Erickson voted in favor of CR3-2019.

A potential weakness of the public financing referendum championed by many of you on the Delegation is the risk of subversion by candidates who believe they can win thru large donations from

Developers - the biggest Special Interest in the County. We think this Bill will reduce this risk. The question we have is why does this Bill not have the same standards to include Delegation Members?

In conclusion, HoCo 12-19 improves Transparency, Open Government and perhaps the Trust which is desperately needed by strengthening the public financing law. Your constituents – the Voters are extremely apprehensive so by you supporting this Bill with our suggested amendments it would be a positive step in providing Integrity for us all.

Thank You.

Hiruy Hagdu  
HCCA Board of Directors

**Exhibit 1: Detailed Breakdown of Campaign Contributions by Erickson Management Elected Officials**

County Council		County Executive		State Delegates		State Senators	
District 2 (Opel Jones)	\$2,737.32	Calvin Ball	\$ 3,000.00	District 13 (Shane Pendergrass)	\$3,200.00	District 13 (Guy Guzzone)	\$7,850.00
District 3 (Christiana Rigby)	\$ 750.00	Allan Kittleman	\$ 7,150.00	District 12 (Jessica Feldmark)	\$3,250.00	District 12 (Clarence Lam)	\$ 850.00
District 5 (David Yungman)	\$ 650.00			District 12 (Eric Ebersole)	\$ 250.00		
				District 12 (Terri Hill)	\$ 250.00		
				District 9B (Courtney Watson)	\$1,500.00	District 9 (Katie Hester)	\$ 500.00
	\$4,137.32		\$ 10,150		\$ 8,450		\$ 9,200
<b>Cumulative Erickson Living Contribution to Howard County Leaders</b>				<b>\$ 31,937.32</b>			