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**From:** Alicia Wilmes <awilmes09@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, January 14, 2026 9:53 AM  
**To:** CouncilMail  
**Subject:** Request to present testimony on needed reforms for the Howard County Ethics Commission

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Dear Howard County Council Members,

I am requesting to present this testimony to advocate for needed reforms to the Howard County Ethics Commission, especially concerning the appointment and vetting process of its members.

-Alicia Wilmes

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**To the Members of the Howard County Council:**

I appear before you today to urge meaningful reforms that are essential to preserving public confidence in Howard County’s government—specifically, reforms that strengthen transparency, independence, and credibility in our ethics oversight system.

First, Howard County must improve transparency in the vetting of appointed officials. At present, the public has little visibility into how candidates’ credentials, professional affiliations, and potential conflicts of interest are reviewed and verified prior to appointment. A robust and transparent vetting process is not a procedural formality; it is the foundation of ethical governance. The public deserves assurance that appointees have undergone a thorough, documented review and that any potential conflicts have been identified and addressed before appointments are finalized—not after concerns are raised.

Second, the method by which members of the Howard County Ethics Commission are selected requires reform. While the current system—appointments made solely by the County Executive and confirmed by the Council—may comply with minimum state legal requirements, it does not reflect best practices for ensuring independence. An ethics commission must not only be impartial; it must be perceived as impartial by the public it serves. Concentrating appointment authority in a single branch, even with confirmation, creates an appearance of executive influence that can undermine confidence in the commission’s independence.

Maryland itself provides a stronger model. The State Ethics Commission draws appointments from both the executive and legislative branches, intentionally dispersing appointment power to safeguard independence. Howard County should aspire to the same standard.

To fully align with nationally recognized best practices for ethics commissions, reforms should include broadening appointment authority beyond the executive, ensuring the commission has dedicated, commission-controlled staff, and strengthening public transparency through regular reporting and accessible disclosures. These measures are widely recognized as essential to protecting ethics bodies from political pressure and ensuring they function as true watchdogs—not symbolic ones.

Howard County has an ethics framework in place, but frameworks alone do not build trust—credible independence does. By strengthening transparency and reforming how our ethics commission is structured and supported, this Council has the opportunity to reinforce public confidence, protect the integrity of county government, and demonstrate that Howard County holds itself to the highest ethical standards.

Thank you for your attention and for your commitment to ethical governance.