

Testimony in Opposition to Council Bill 7–2026

Good evening Councilmembers,

My name is Amir Naviwala, and I'm a resident of Howard County and a candidate for County Council.

I am here to speak **in opposition to Council Bill 7.**

This bill is being framed as a neutral ethics or governance reform, but in reality it is a **solution in search of a problem**—and worse, it risks creating new problems that undermine both democratic accountability and the proper functioning of County government.

The premise of this bill is that the County Council poses a threat of “interference” with boards and commissions, particularly quasi-judicial bodies like the Board of Appeals. But the real and well-documented risk to these bodies is **not Council oversight**—it is **improper corporate influence**, unequal access, and off-the-record pressure exerted by well-resourced private interests. That is where legislative attention should be focused.

Instead, CB7 shifts scrutiny away from those power imbalances and toward the elected legislative branch itself.

Howard County already has clear and established rules governing **ex parte communications**, **quasi-judicial conduct**, and **ethical boundaries** for both Councilmembers and board members. Those standards exist precisely to prevent improper influence while still allowing Councilmembers to do their jobs: raising concerns, responding to constituents, and acting when they detect potential misconduct or procedural irregularities.

CB7 does not clarify those rules—it **overlaps them with vague and undefined language**, such as “hinder,” “obstruct,” or “disrupt.” These terms are not meaningfully defined in the bill and invite subjective interpretation. As written, this legislation risks chilling lawful speech, discouraging legitimate oversight, and creating confusion about what Councilmembers are permitted—or afraid—to say or do.

That is a **dangerous slippery slope.**

The County Council is not a ceremonial body. It is a co-equal branch of County government with a duty to investigate, question, and respond when something appears improper. Attempting to regulate how Councilmembers speak, inquire, or act—outside of clear ethical violations—sets a troubling precedent and could itself become a form of interference with representative government.

Finally, the timing and framing of this bill raises legitimate concerns. Rather than addressing systemic vulnerabilities to corporate influence, CB7 appears designed to **score political points** by constraining minority voices on the Council under the guise of neutrality. That is not good governance.

If the Council believes reform is needed, then the correct approach is to **scrap this bill entirely** and begin anew with legislation that:

- strengthens transparency,
- limits improper private influence,
- reinforces public trust in quasi-judicial bodies,
- and preserves the Council's constitutional and democratic role.

CB7 does none of those things.

For these reasons, I urge the Council to **reject Council Bill 7**.

Thank you.

Howard County, Maryland CB 7—Board of Appeals

The legislation prohibits the County Council, its members, and council staff from obstructing or interfering with the deliberations and decisions of any Council Board or Commission.

However, CB 7 does not define critical terms such as "hindering," "obstructing," or "disrupting," nor does it delineate the permissible boundaries for council members or their staff to engage in constituent communications. As a result, this measure may have implications for citizens' ability to communicate concerns to their elected representatives, potentially restricting opportunities for public input on county affairs.

Furthermore, the absence of clear procedural safeguards raises concerns regarding how individuals accused under these provisions would be assured of fair and impartial hearing, which may contribute to an atmosphere of uncertainty and diminished trust.

In conclusion many of us, especially those communities, your constituents, who have experienced the Board of Appeals chaos such as my community, Highland regarding the GoKart case are depending on this County Council to take the necessary action to once and for all make a wrong a right! It is our right to speak out. This Bill is absolute nonsense, and we encourage you to just say "NO."

However, reality says this will not occur especially since Council-members Jones, Rigby and Yungmann have their names on this Bill. You are the same ones who

unfortunately voted against having the most qualified nominee, Andrea LeWinter as a Board of Appeals member. This was inexcusable. We thank Deb Jung for nominating Ms. LeWinter and Liz Walsh for her nominee, both nominees being lawyers. We simply believe that qualified individuals should be sitting on the Board of Appeals. Stop attempting to put a band-aid when the Board of Appeals wounds are too deep. This Bill and CR24 do nothing to once and for all attempt to correct the problems.

Therefore, I am against CB 7.

Angela Bruce

Testimony Regarding CB 7

Greetings County Council Members,

My name is Lisa Krausz, and I am one of the Co-Facilitators of the Stop Grace Coalition. We are working to keep Howard County free from the impacts of plastic incineration pollution and processes that heat plastics up to extreme temperatures - like the process soon to be operating at W.R. Grace off of Grace Drive in Columbia. I am speaking as myself tonight.

I am testifying to register my opposition to County Bill 7. In discussions with other community residents in Howard County, it is clear that CB 7 is a performative bill that does nothing to address serious concerns with the way the Board of Appeals has operated. Instead the bill appears to be a distraction from the real reforms that are needed by shifting focus on to Council Members who have been working to reform the BOA. It appears that the County Council is not taking seriously the many concerns raised by residents and community groups who have either experienced a perceived miscarriage of justice under Howard County's quasi-judicial review process or who have been putting forth solid reform suggestions for years.

There are, in fact, many reforms that need to be undertaken with Howard County's quasi-judicial process which includes an appeals process to a Hearing Examiner, then on to the BOA. The system seems fundamentally flawed based on primarily two factors: (1) the de novo process from the Hearing Examiner hearings to the BOA hearings, which ignore the findings of the Hearing Examiner and which are expensive and often pose an impediment for community members to get a fair shake, and (2) the low qualifications required for Board of Appeals members, which continuously dogs the BOA's credibility and ability to better serve Howard County.

Both of these issues can be addressed substantively and successfully by the County Council.

Yet CB7 instead attempts to muzzle valid criticism and concerns by our County Council members with very little specificity to guide its implementation. This bill seems to fit in neatly to the current zeitgeist which attempts to stifle free speech and critiques of government overreach through punitive actions.

For those of us who feel justice was not served under the BOA Hearing process, this bill feels like a slap in the face, and we are disappointed that Council Member Opel Jones has proposed this bill rather than tackling the serious reforms that are needed.

The County Council must understand that you have a deeper problem on your hands when it comes to Howard County's quasi-judicial processes and the way BOA operates. Other County Council Members are not the problem here.



HCCA

Howard County Citizens Association

Since 1961...

The Voice Of The People of Howard County

Date: 20 January 2026

Subject: HCCA Testimony for CB7-2026

My name is Stu Kohn from Scaggsville representing the Howard County Citizens Association, HCCA as is President.

We appreciated you, Dr. Jones, stating your appreciation for our organization in October during public testimony. Yes - We are fortunate to live in a country where freedom of speech is a blessing and "Choose Civility" should be a priority. Keeping this in mind we have concerns about this proposed Bill as it is currently written.

Please refer to page 1, line 14. The words, "Hinder", "Obstruct", and or "Disrupt" needs to be clearly defined. Without such an amendment the Bill is too generic and will no doubt lead to interpretation on the part of anyone filing a complaint and the accused victim. It would be extremely helpful, Dr. Jones, to provide specific examples of what type of circumstances will constitute your colleagues or staff to be accused of such violations. For example, will any Council-member be forbidden to speak at a press-conference or testify at Board of Appeals hearings in support of their constituents' concerns?

Please refer to page 1, line 15 and 19 – reference the referral to Subsection (D) as we don't see it appearing in the Charter but has been corrected by an amendment.

Please refer to page 1, lines 23 thru 27, how were these specific Boards and Commissions determined?

Before approval we recommend the following questions be addressed and included as amendments to the Bill.

1. What is the rationale for excluding entities which are not defined in Lines 23 thru 27?
2. Is the Council to determine specific violations?
3. What are the penalties as it is not defined in the Bill?
4. Will Council-members be sanctioned and if so, what would this mean?
5. Will the Council by majority vote determine the outcome?
6. How will any accused violator receive Due Process?
7. How does the accused violator appeal their case?

8. Will there be a public hearing for the accused individual?

9. Will it be permissible for Council-members to testify on behalf of their constituents at BOA hearings and would this be considered undue pressure on the members of the board?

10. Will Council-members be permitted to speak for example at a Press-conference regarding a given case on behalf of their constituents?

Harry Truman in a speech to Congress in August 1950 stated, "Once a government is committed to the principle silencing the voice of the opposition, it has only one way to go, and that is down the path of increasingly repressive measures, until it becomes a source of terror to all its citizens and creates a country where everyone lives in fear."

In our opinion this Bill needs to be withdrawn or severely amended by adopting amendments regarding our suggested questions to make it relevant for all concerned parties.



Stu Kohn
HCCA President