

**Testimony on HB 896: Stadium Bonds
Before the Appropriations Committee
by Bill Marker**

wmmarker@gmail.com

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\$1.2 Billion Should Buy Control, Not A Lease

In 1986-87, as founder and President of Marylanders for Sports Sanity, Inc. (MASS), I led citizen support for Memorial Stadium. We opposed spending some \$200 million to build new baseball and football stadiums. My role in the issue is discussed in *Field of Schemes*, by Joanna Cagan and Neil deMause.

MASS's Articles of Incorporation stated:

The purpose for which the Corporation is formed is to oppose the building of a new stadium, partially or totally out of public resources, unless the proponents of a new stadium can carry the burden of proof to reasonably establish:

- 1. That all public treasuries and the pockets of the citizens of Maryland will be repaid their investment in a new stadium, and*
- 2. That all public treasuries and the citizens of Maryland would not have a higher rate of return from alternative investments.*

MASS's position was that spending \$200 million (which I think ended up being some \$400 million) to build new stadiums was not the most cost-effective way to accomplish keeping the Orioles in Baltimore, as that could be accomplished at a smaller cost. The Orioles could be purchased by the State for something less than \$100 million, considering that the world champion New York Mets had recently been sold for little more than that. Ownership of the team, without the right to move the team, could then have been sold to private individuals for something less than the purchase price.

Now the Maryland Stadium Authority, presumably in consort with the Orioles and Ravens, is proposing – or is that extorting -- the people of Maryland to spend up to another \$1.2 **BILLION** (\$600 million per stadium) to keep the teams in town for another couple of decades. Will they demand trillions the next time?

Without commenting on whether the desired stadium changes are a good idea and should be done, spending \$1.2 billion for a couple of decades of occupancy is not the highest return we should get for those funds. That amount should cover the value of controlling the right to move the franchises, which must be transferred to the public in return for such a major public investment. This would spare today's officeholders still in office in 2044 the embarrassment of having to answer why didn't they resolve this issue in 2022.

I suggest the Governor, General Assembly and Attorney General should revisit the law that was passed to keep the Colts in Baltimore. A court ruled that the Colts had already left town when the law went into effect. We have time to act now.

I also suggest that any new leases should specify that any seasons or partial seasons that do not happen, whether due to the owners or players or both, should not count towards the running of the lease. For example, if the recent MLB lockout had shortened the season by a month, losing to the people of Maryland the financial and other benefits or hosting approximately 15 home games, such a lease would be automatically extended one month into the season following the scheduled end of the lease.

Finally, I note that during the 1987 Legislative Session, a joint hearing was held for testimony on the anti-Memorial Stadium legislation. As I recall, proponents of new stadiums were allowed to testify for some 6 hours, during which legislators told Orioles owner Edward Bennett Williams that they had been law students of his. Mayor Clarence "Du" Burns promised to spend \$1 million annually of Baltimore City general funds towards paying for the stadiums. Millions of those tax funds were subsequently spent. Only after those many hours of testimony were pro-Memorial Stadium legislative leader Senator Jack Lapidus and I allowed to speak to those legislators who remained. I thank the Committee for what I hope this year will be a fair hearing to both sides.

Bill Marker is a long-time community and political activist. He has lived in Baltimore City near Martin Luther King and Washington Boulevards for 41 years. He graduated from the University of Maryland Law School in 1976 and is a retired State employee. As a State employee he served as Secretary of the Maryland State Employees Council (AFT). He may be contacted at wmmarker@gmail.com.