



*Queen
Anne's
County*

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & ZONING

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WRITTEN TESTIMONY – SUPPORT

DATE: 16 MARCH 2022
TO: JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS COMMITTEE
FROM: AMY G. MOREDOCK, PLANNING DIRECTOR
SUBJECT: **SENATE BILL 956**
CRIMINAL LAW - THREATS TO PUBLIC OFFICIALS

I am writing on behalf of the Queen Anne's County Department of Planning and Zoning in **SUPPORT OF SB956** and its intention to extend criminal penalties for threats leveled against county health officers, election administrators, and building and housing inspectors as they attempt to carry out their duties. Local jurisdictions are charged with the duties to implement and enforce land use and comprehensive planning within their communities. While this is oftentimes a rewarding charge, it is also a challenging one.

Every planning and zoning department puts great emphasis on professional and consistent service to its residents. A vast majority of the projects and building permits are processed proficiently with no undue inconvenience or challenge. However, there are project and building permit applications that are also more demanding depending upon the nature of the project itself, the neighborhood in which it is occurring, and the citizens involved. In these more challenging instances, the enforcement authority in a standard zoning code and the right of entry articulated therein is often directly and aggressively challenged.

In extreme cases involving zoning enforcement, there are often many factors that lead to a zoning code violation. A property does not become the subject of an enforcement action overnight, and there has generally been a great deal of impact on a neighborhood leading up an official site visit by a zoning inspector. Such zoning violations are typically the result of much more complicated causes involving mental and environmental health concerns. In such cases, zoning inspectors are called upon to enter toxic and sometimes unsafe situations. These cases may involve threats from dangerous animals and even intimidation with firearms. Incidents of this nature have been documented in Queen Anne's County.

For these reasons and many more which are less pronounced but cumulatively as significant, I support and appreciate the foresight of the inclusion of building and housing inspectors within the list of public servants protected under SB956 as proposed. Building and housing inspectors are dedicated public servants who work under stressful conditions in order make their communities better and safer places for all residents.