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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
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Justice 40 HB842
Testimony of Maryland State Delegate Deni Taveras

Thank you, Chair Barnes and esteemed members of the Appropriation Committee, and respected colleagues of ENT. It is an honor to be before you. I am here to ask for your favorable report on HB842. HB842 is a bill that creates a commission to ensure that Justice 40 funds are allocated appropriately to disadvantaged and neglected communities and are equally disbursed to at least 40% of under-represented MBEs that reflect the communities they are looking to serve. In this legislation we are also looking for opportunities to build capacity, workforce development, and build up MBEs so that they are able to compete at a larger scale.

For the first time in history, as part of the Investing in America Agenda, President Joe Biden set a goal of dedicating 40 percent of federal government-wide investments in climate, green energy, housing, and other infrastructure investments to be dedicated to disadvantaged communities that historically have been marginalized by underinvestment and overburdened by pollution. This effort is popularly now known as the Justice 40 Initiative. In Maryland, as of January 2024, there has been a \$12 Billion investment in 174 projects. However, the vast majority of those projects do not reflect the needs of my community.

To date, only three states in the country have designated how their Justice 40 money should be spent (CA, NY, and SC), to ensure actual investments are made to critical areas in those states, so no community was left behind. While I applaud everything our great state has done to move the climate change issue forward, even properly defining disadvantaged communities, we need to ensure that we are in fact investing in critical projects in disadvantaged communities. Respectfully, the \$1 million fiscal note as drafted is equally out of touch since the bill doesn't call for the things being requested here. The fact is studies consistently show our current environmental policies benefit the well to do and are subsidized by the poor and disenfranchised who see no benefit. This is our opportunity to correct that, at no real cost to the state. At a dire financial time like this, we as a government cannot afford to work in silos.

Justice 40 if implemented properly is a vital step towards racial and economic equity. We all know that communities of color disproportionately bear the brunt of climate change and are victimized by their very environmental surroundings. Because no one is looking comprehensively on how we can use the environmental space to prevent crime (through an urban design concept called CPTED), areas like Langley Park continue to be plagued by crime and drug use in unaffordable, unsustainable benign neglected housing. This is our time to correct that when the federal investment dollars are there. If not now, when? If not us, who?

In conclusion, HB842 is needed to ensure equitable distribution of federal governmentwide funding, so disadvantaged communities like mine can access the resources needed for safe, affordable, sustainable and healthy living. With this, I ask for your favorable report on HB842.