

SB0643-JPR-ADMIN.pdf

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SB0643

February 16, 2024

TO: Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: **Brandon M. Scott, Mayor, City of Baltimore**

RE: Senate Bill 643 – Public Information Act – Surveillance Images – Illegal Dumping in Baltimore City

POSITION: **Support**

Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that on behalf of the Baltimore City Administration (BCA), I support Senate Bill (SB) 0643.

SB 0643 would remove barriers to the sharing of surveillance images of suspected illegal dumpers so that they can be released to the public to help identify suspects. Presently a custodian of a surveillance image must deny inspection of those surveillance images except in certain circumstances provided in § 10–112 of the Criminal Law Article.

The Special Investigations Unit (SIU) is a unit within Baltimore City's Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) Code Enforcement Division. They investigate large-scale dumping complaints and work to criminally prosecute illegal dumpers, seize vehicles used in dumping, and issue environmental citations. If criminal charges are brought, fines vary based on the weight or volume of the litter. Those found guilty may be subject to up to \$50,000 in fines, up to 5 years imprisonment, forfeiture of their vehicle, points on their Driver's License, loss of City held licenses and permits, loss of City contracts, court-ordered community service, or restitution for cleanup costs.

DHCD employs a variety of technologies in the pursuit of capturing illegal dumping. The agency owns and operates motion-activated cameras and has inspectors working daily to monitor and investigate the dumping captured. Camera locations are installed in areas that are found to be used for illegal dumping based on 311 calls, community complaints, agency referrals, the work of our investigators in the field, and the suitability of the location.

DHCD's SIU faces some obstacles to catching illegal dumpers. To prosecute an individual for illegal dumping, we need sufficient evidence to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the person committed the crime. SIU investigators utilize eyewitness accounts, motion-activated cameras, and any receipts or identifying information found on site. However, cameras do not work everywhere because of site geography or level of activity, and our cameras may not capture a license plate if a vehicle is used. It is often difficult to prove who did the actual dumping, but anytime we have enough evidence that a person dumped, we file criminal charges.

SB 643 would allow our SIUs to publicly disseminate photos of suspects captured on illegal dumping cameras in an attempt to identify them and reduce the future re-occurrence of this activity by an individual. This is similar to what Metro Crime Stoppers and the Baltimore City Police Department (BPD) do to seek public assistance in identifying criminal suspects. This bill would allow us to seek public assistance in identifying suspects and help to curb illegal dumping.

For these reasons, I respectfully request a **favorable** report on SB 643.

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SB 643 Testimony (1).pdf

Uploaded by: Jill Carter

Position: FAV



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**Testimony of Senator Jill P. Carter
In Favor of SB0643 – Public Information Act - Surveillance Images -
Illegal Dumping in Baltimore City
Before the Judicial Proceedings Committee
On February 16th 2024**

Mr. Chairman, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

Senate Bill 0643 strikes down a provision in the Maryland Public Information Act (PIA) pertaining to the use and disclosure of surveillance images captured by cameras located at illegal dumping sites in Baltimore City. In striking down the provision, this would allow for the Baltimore Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), which manages these cameras, to share the images to the public, with the goal of soliciting community assistance in identifying suspects.

Since 2005, the city of Baltimore has been authorized to install surveillance systems at state and city-owned dumping sites and use surveillance images to enforce litter control laws. If caught on camera, suspects are subject to criminal charges in District Court. The city maintains approximately 100 cameras, which are reviewed by DHCD. For example, the cameras can sometimes capture a face on camera along with the vehicle being used, but not always a license plate. Similar to what the Baltimore Police Department already does, DHCD

would like to be able to utilize social media to solicit community assistance in identifying these suspects.

This bill is incredibly important to me and hits very close to home in my district. My office gets many, many calls about constituents being subject to illegal dumping, and something needs to be done. As stated in the Baltimore Banner, it is a “public nuisance that can attract animals and pests, cause unsavory odors and set off a chain reaction that produces more blight”. It also causes health risks and can be a fire hazard along with an overall decrease in quality of life, all the while costing the city millions of dollars in the costs of cleanup. Beyond just the health and safety concerns, the dumps create a negative first impression of our thriving District 41 communities, staining their reputations for passersby. Our neighborhoods need to get cleaned up.

SB0643 is an essential bill for District 41 and Baltimore at large. It can provide an effective deterrent for those who illegally dump. This bill helps to not only identify the individuals involved in illegal dumping, but also to get them prosecuted accordingly.

As such, I urge this committee to issue a favorable report in regards to SB0643.

Respectfully,

Jill P. Carter