



OUR MISSION:

Working to enhance the economic prosperity of greater Silver Spring through robust promotion of our member businesses and unrelenting advocacy on their behalf.

July 8, 2022

The Honorable Gabe Albornoz
and Members of the Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue, Sixth Floor
Rockville, Maryland 20850

RE: Bill 14-22, Police – Private Security Camera Incentive Program – Established

Dear Council President Albornoz and Members of the Council:

On behalf of the Greater Silver Spring Chamber of Commerce, representing some 300 employers, mostly small businesses, and several non-profit organizations in greater Silver Spring, we submit the following comments on **Bill 14-22, Police – Private Security Camera Incentive Program – Established**.

Public safety and security are paramount to the stability and success of any business community. That's why the Greater Silver Spring Chamber has worked diligently, especially during the past year, to urge County leaders to undertake efforts to address the increase in violent crime in our community. We are encouraged that recent efforts seem to be yielding some success. As an example: the mobile security cameras monitored by 3rd District Police on Georgia Avenue and at Bonifant/Fenton Streets seem to be effective as deterrents and in identifying criminal activity in those areas.

Having worked closely with 3rd District Police on public safety matters for many years, we recognize the role that a good security camera system can play in both deterring and solving crime. That's why we really want to support this legislation. However, we also have seen some of the shortcomings of security camera systems that are not properly installed, monitored, or are insufficient to capture useful information.

Among the stories shared over the years: There was a camera at the business, but it wasn't working; the camera was on, but it wasn't recording because the memory was full and no one on the staff knew how to download the data; no one on the staff reviewed the recordings before deleting them; the camera was positioned so that it captured only the top of the intruders head; and more. We note these situations to point out that simply having a camera that records is only part of the equation for an effective security camera system.

The bill proposes to provide a rebate or voucher "solely to offset the costs of the security camera." It does not mention the cost of the installation, the cost for recording equipment that would retain data for a proscribed period of time, or the cost of regular monitoring and maintenance, all of which can be substantial.

To reiterate, we would like to support this measure, but the fact that the program is proposed "subject to appropriation," concerns us. We fear that it raises unrealistic expectations among businesses and residents for rebates that cannot be funded. Have Councilmembers considered the cost of this program?

Home security camera systems can be purchased for a few hundred dollars. However outdoor systems for businesses can cost tens of thousands of dollars. It's worth noting that inexpensive systems will retain recordings for maybe a week, but most businesses will want systems that record and keep data for 30 days or more. Add to that the cost of installation by professionals. And, finally, there's the personnel cost to assure that the cameras are working, recordings are reviewed, and memory is cleared to allow for new recordings.

Again, we applaud the intent of this legislation and want to support it. What would be ideal would be a program that supports businesses in the purchase of security camera systems that would be linked into a central system and monitored by police, creating a real time picture when crime is occurring in identified priority areas. Such a program would provide eligible businesses with specifications on the types of cameras included and include a requirement for them to link to the police monitoring system, or provide real time access when necessary. This kind of modern system would greatly enhance crime prevention and improve the ability of police to respond to, and stop crime more quickly.

One last point that was raised in our Chamber's discussions of this bill: What about businesses that have just recently purchased or upgraded their security camera systems? Would they be eligible for at least some financial assistance, especially if they agreed to link into the monitoring system I described in the previous paragraph?

We thank you for considering these comments and suggestions. Should you have questions, don't hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Jane Redicker
President & CEO