

TO: Montgomery County Council
FROM: Celine-Marie Pascale and Mercedes Santos
SUBJECT: Bill 14-23, Police – Late Night Business Safety Plan
DATE: March 12, 2023

Dear Montgomery County Council,

We lived in Lofts 24 for ten years and enjoyed a flourishing community of professionals living in Silver Spring City Center. In a very short period of time, bars and hookah lounges proliferated around our home at Bonifant & Fenton. With these businesses came carjackings, shootings and stabbings; three units in our building took gun fire in the middle of the night. Large numbers of intoxicated and armed men were partying on Bonifant near Sweet Sweet Kitchen, often until 6:00 am. Residents stopped going to the gym before work because it wasn't safe.

Along with Lofts 24 residents, we attended community meetings, wrote letters, and worked with community partners to regain a sense of safety. Cities across the country faced similar increases in crime associated with hookah lounges and late-night bars. Our community did research and found that Baltimore successfully implemented legislation to regulate these businesses; we asked the County to use that legislation as a model. Lofts 24 collected 600 signatures from local businesses, residents, and local residents who frequent the downtown. County government never so much as acknowledged of our petition, letters, or emails.

Now, Montgomery County has produced bill 14-23 and we want to be hopeful, but we are not. If all of these measures in this bill could be required (they are not) and effectively enforced (unlikely) this bill does not address what is happening in the streets as a result of these businesses in the community. People come out of these establishments and continue to party in parking lots and on the street. None of the violence that we have experienced would be prevented by these measures.

In July 2022, we left friends behind and moved out of Montgomery County. Our move to Western New York was not based on the violence but our move out of the neighborhood absolutely was. We've lost a lot by leaving Silver Spring. But we no longer worry about being shot while sleeping. We have little confidence that any of our voices will be heard. But we want to be clear: This bill doesn't go far enough to protect those who by choice or circumstance remain. **Listen to the residents of Lofts 24.**