

Invitation to Audience (online submissions) 11-6-2023

Timestamp	First name	Last name	City	State	Zip Code	Are you representing yourself?	Remarks	Attachment
2023-11-06 8:48:11	Kurt	Svendsen	ARNOLD	MD	21012	Yes	See attached document expressing my concerns related to the process leading up to the introduction of legislation, and the lack of genuine community engagement and transparency.	YES

November 06, 2023 County Council – Invitation to Audience

The purpose of my testimony is to express my concern that despite “lip service” to the contrary, the process **leading up to** the introduction of County legislation often lacks public engagement and transparency. A clear example of this was seen in the process **leading up to** the introduction of the ***Schools Adequate Public Facilities legislation (council bill 52-23)***:

- During a **February 14, 2023** Council Work Session, the Administration’s representative, Peter Baron, spoke to council bill 9-23 which extended the termination date related to adequate public facilities and public schools: “...the school APF work group has met for about a little over two years now. There is a massive volume of data. A massive volume of work has been done. We're close to start shopping uh concepts.”
- Shortly after that, Councilmember Pickard stated: "We are ready. We've analyzed the data. We need to present the data um in a way that's understandable. It is a complicated topic and there are a lot of, um, misunderstandings as regard to, in regard to, school APF out there."
- At the **following March 6, 2023 Council hearing** on Bill 9-23, I testified that the County website provided no public information sharing / briefings regarding the substantive work of the School APF Work Group, not even it’s membership.
 - I was eventually able to obtain access to this information but only after submitting a Public Information Act (PIA) request.
- That night, I also expressed my concern that the eventually proposed legislation was going to be **“dropped”** on the other members of the County Council and the general citizenry for the very first time ... when a Council Ordinance is formally introduced, and the legislative clock starts ticking.
 - **Indeed, the first public hearing for the eventual Bill (52-23) was timed to fall on July 3rd; tucked between a weekend and the July 4th holiday.**
 - **A final vote was taken that same night;** ostensibly to avoid any potential delays due to the Council’s impending August recess.
- The School APF Workgroup’s Final Report was issued in May 2023, but was not posted on the County website until July 5th, a few days **after** this public hearing and final vote.
 - This fact was confirmed in response to another PIA request.
- There was **not even a Work Session** for this Bill (52-23) before it’s first public hearing and “rushed” final vote on July 3rd.

This is not an isolated incident. Now there’s the “Essential Worker Housing Access Act” (Bill 78-23)... but that’s a subject for later tonight.

Sincerely,

Kurt Svendsen, Arnold, MD