

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

October 26, 2020

The Honorable Nicole R. Nason
Administrator
Federal Highway Administration
1200 New Jersey Ave. SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

The Honorable Aimee Jorjani
Chairman
Advisory Council on Historic Preservation
401 F Street NW, Suite 308
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Administrator Nason and Chairman Jorjani:

We are writing to express our concerns about the potential impacts of Maryland's proposed Capital Beltway-widening project on sites of historic and cultural significance. In particular, Morningstar Tabernacle No. 88 Moses Hall and Cemetery and the Gibson Grove A.M.E. Zion Church are National Register-eligible sites in an historically African American community that has already suffered the impacts of the Beltway's initial construction. If the project were to proceed with new impacts to the site, it would add to the cumulative damage caused by the Beltway's construction through the Gibson Grove community that isolated its church from the cemetery grounds.

Without urgent attention to the Moses Hall site and its significance early in the environmental and historic preservation review process under the requirements of NEPA and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, we risk once again committing the error of building roads without regard to the historic, cultural, and social values of vulnerable communities, especially those of African American heritage. Instead of repeating past mistakes, we should pursue infrastructure development that promotes inclusivity, connectivity, and uplift, rather than further isolation and erosion of historic and cultural assets.

We urge you, therefore, to use your role in the historic preservation and environmental review process to emphasize the importance of avoiding to the greatest extent possible physical impacts to the Moses Hall property and the Gibson Grove A.M.E. Zion Church as part of any agreement to construct new lanes on the Beltway. Furthermore, we hope that you will work with stakeholders to advance the goal of historic and cultural preservation for the Gibson Grove community. Besides simply avoiding further harm, a major infrastructure project should be an

occasion to promote recovery from earlier impacts by enhancing the visibility and access of the cemetery site and its connection to the community.

At minimum, we hope that you will use your platform to ensure a rigorous and thorough historic preservation review process that establishes the full scope and significance of historic sites that could be impacted by the construction of new roadways, with stipulations that the consulting parties have the ability to review design documents, advocate fully for the community, and that the future private partner commit to the requirement to avoid harmful physical impacts to these fragile historic sites.

Your role in this process is even more important given that a public-private partnership (P3) was chosen in advance as the approach to delivering the proposed Beltway-widening/managed lanes project. With a P3 structure, the details of many design decisions with consequences for historic sites will be in the hands of the private sector entity that wins a contract with the State. Therefore, it is imperative to establish early on in the review process certain priorities in the public interest that must be fully considered in any project that moves forward.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and for your work to ensure the integrity of the historic preservation review process.

Sincerely,



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress



David Trone
Member of Congress