



March 8, 2021

Councilman Eric Costello  
Baltimore City Council, District 11  
100 Holliday Street  
Room 509  
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

Dear Councilman Costello,

The Walters Art Museum, located in the Mount Vernon neighborhood of Baltimore City, strongly opposes City Council bill 21-0029, which has been assigned to the Ways and Means Committee. The bill would increase the annual licence fee for commercial parking facilities by nearly 5 times the current rate, from \$5.10 for every 100 sq. ft. to \$25.00 over the next several years. **This bill would be detrimental to the museum, its visitors, and employees.**

**Parking is cited frequently by our members and visitors as a major factor in deciding whether they visit the Walters.** Our parking lot, located at the corner of Centre and Cathedral Streets, is critical to attracting visitors to the museum--visitors who then frequently will visit nearby restaurants and shops. Having a parking lot adjacent to the museum is fundamental in encouraging and providing a positive experience for visitors. With the loss of street parking when bike lanes were instituted, our lot is also the closest place for our senior or disabled visitors.

We have already been contending with the challenging perceptions that suburban residents have about safety in Baltimore City. Increasing parking licenses would force us to raise our rates, thereby leading to decreased visitations. The Walters board and staff are committed to easing access to the museum for visitors, especially as we reopen our doors and work to recover from the pandemic.

Specifically, this bill would increase our fees from \$2,600 to \$5,170 in year one with the cost increasing to over \$10,000 per year by 2024. To give you context, the parking lot net revenue is approximately \$52k per year.

While the Walters joins other parking providers around the City in opposing this bill, the museum is unique in several ways:

- The museum receives about \$240,000 in City grant funds to help support the annual operations of this City-owned museum. These funds are intended to care for the artwork, deliver educational programs, and keep access to the art open for the public. It also represents less than 2% of the total annual cost of operating this museum on behalf of the City. Increased parking fees would “rob Peter to pay Paul,” and we would, in effect, return a portion of the grant back to the City instead of using it for the intended and much needed purpose.
- As the parking lot is an essential amenity to visitors and staff, we do not operate it merely as a revenue generating venture (that is our rates need to remain attractive and amenable to visitors to the museum). We use the lot for parking our staff, docents, and volunteers, who all pay a discounted rate; museum members (also discounted rate); general museum visitors; as well as contractors who are regularly working on our five buildings (3 are owned by the City).
- The museum already pays a negotiated property tax rate on the parking lot based on our parking lot income derived from visitorship.

Councilman Costello, should you or other members of the Ways and Means Committee have questions about this letter, please contact Kathleen Basham at [kbasham@thewalters.org](mailto:kbasham@thewalters.org). We are eager to support your opposition to this proposed bill. We believe the proposed increased fees in City Council Bill 21-0029 will lead to long-term problems for Baltimore City at a time when we will need to re-attract visitors, tourists, and employees back to enliven our City and support local businesses.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

*Kathleen Basham*

Kathleen Basham

Chief Operating Officer on behalf of Julia Marciari-Alexander