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March 1, 2013



The Honorable Members of the Baltimore City Council  
c/o Office of the City Council President  
100 N. Holliday St., Suite 400  
Baltimore, MD 21202

*re: Support for Council Bill 13-0186 Soliciting-Prohibited Places*

Dear Mr. President and City Council Members:

Visit Baltimore **supports** Council Bill 13-0186 *Soliciting-Prohibited Places*. The presence of solicitors in Baltimore City's roadways, shoulders and streets not only creates a dangerous condition for both solicitors and drivers, but also gives visitors a negative impression of the city.

Visit Baltimore is the city's official destination marketing organization, and our mission is to generate economic benefits to Baltimore through the attraction of leisure, group and convention visitors. Last year, we welcomed 24 million visitors who generated \$4.75 billion in economic impact, and \$248 million in local tax revenue. In carrying out our mission, Visit Baltimore works to promote a positive image of the city. This work becomes challenging when guests, upon entrance to and departure from our city via major arteries, are faced with panhandlers approaching vehicles. This is often their first and last impression of Baltimore.

According to recent survey of meeting planners about their view of Baltimore and other cities, Baltimore ranked above average in many areas: transportation, walkability, attractions, accommodation, dining and overall experience. However, the planners' perception of public safety in Baltimore ranked well below average. Many of our hospitality industry members attribute a substantial part of this negative impression to panhandlers who constantly approach visitors.

The presence of panhandlers can also lead to decreased visitor economic activity in the city. Meeting planners may opt not to host their meetings here, and leisure and group tourists may not choose another destination where they do not have to deal with this issue. When people do come here, they are less likely to explore other parts of the city and stay fewer days, costing. According to an unpublished study commissioned in 2009, the loss due to panhandling amounts to \$11.1 million in direct revenue annually.

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Aggressive solicitors, particularly those that "welcome" visitors as they drive into and out of Baltimore, create dangerous conditions and a negative image of the city. For these reasons, Visit Baltimore supports City Council Bill 13-0186 which prohibits solicitation in roadways, shoulders and streets.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Noonan" with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Tom Noonan  
President & CEO

