

B A L T I M O R E
OFFICE OF PROMOTION & THE ARTS

March 13, 2019

TO: Baltimore City Council

FROM: Donna Drew Sawyer, CEO, Baltimore Office of Promotion & The Arts

RE: Council Bill 19-0141R - Creation of the Pennsylvania Avenue Black Arts and Entertainment District

Honorable Council President Young and members of the Baltimore City Council:

On behalf of the Baltimore Office of Promotion & The Arts, Baltimore City's dedicated Arts Council, we support the "Pennsylvania Avenue Black Arts and Entertainment District," as Baltimore City's fourth proposed Arts and Entertainment District. Pennsylvania Avenue is the historic heart of African-American culture in the City of Baltimore. Serving as the city's premier entertainment destination when black performers were not allowed in white venues, the Avenue corridor was a place of cultural vibrancy.

Today with the support of the proposed District's anchor institutions—Arch Social Club, Shake and Bake Family Center, Jubilee Arts, Baltimore Public Market: Avenue Market, Enoch Pratt Free Library Pennsylvania Avenue Branch—and community organizations—Leaders for a Beautiful Struggle, Pennsylvania Avenue Main Street, Fight Blight Baltimore Neighborhood Design Center, Upton CDC, Druid Heights CDC—the Pennsylvania Avenue Black Arts District seeks “to promote cultural and art-focused events, encourage equitable community development, preserve historic cultural sites, and facilitate area improvements that lead to the vitality of community-based, Black-owned enterprises, and Black-led artistic/cultural endeavors.”

Building off recommendations taken from Urban Land Institute's 2015/16 Technical Assistance Panel convening and final report, Pennsylvania Avenue Black Arts and Entertainment District will inspire and unify the neighborhood's existing residents, foster collaboration among the community's stakeholders, and create a geographically defined area to concentrate cultural activation and investment. As noted in the report, the community “yearns to reclaim their proud heritage of African-American entertainment, culture, and commerce.”

Finally, The Maryland Department of Transportation's Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) and the City of Baltimore have partnered to revitalize a main artery bordering the proposed District. A \$27 million project, it will provide the North Avenue corridor with a multi-modal investment in bicycle, pedestrian, and transit improvements. Along with this federally funded TIGER grant, the City of Baltimore will further support economic revitalization, and invest in the creative community there, by offering the property tax credit, the admissions and amusement tax exemption, and the income tax subtraction modification for qualifying work sold by residing artists in the proposed Pennsylvania Avenue Black Arts District.

Respectfully,

