

March 12, 2019

TO: Baltimore City Council
FROM: Al Hutchinson, President and CEO, Visit Baltimore
RE: **COUNCIL BILL 19-0141R** – Creation of Pennsylvania Avenue Black Arts & Entertainment District

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

Visit Baltimore's ability to deliver on our mission – to craft a destination story that is both authentic and compelling – is contingent upon our tourism assets. We wholeheartedly believe that a designated Pennsylvania Avenue Black Arts & Entertainment District would strengthen our efforts to promote Baltimore as a premier visitor and meetings destination.

Baltimore's visitors enjoy our historic places and cultural assets at higher rates than in other U.S. destinations; and, we continue to outpace the national average for attracting visitors that identify as people of color. As a meetings destination, we are also leading our peers in the attraction and servicing of multicultural meetings. Institutions and organizations that celebrate and showcase Baltimore's rich African American history and heritage, as well as our equally diverse and world-class arts and culture scene, are central ingredients to our tourism successes and continued growth. Pennsylvania Avenue is a part of this story, as Visit Baltimore tells through initiatives including but not limited to enhanced Pennsylvania Avenue/Upton neighborhood pages on Baltimore.org; special tours bringing visitors to and through the neighborhood to enjoy monuments such as the Billie Holiday statue and history of the Royal Theatre through expert reenactors and guides; and, regular collaboration with as well as promotion of neighborhood venues such as The Avenue Bakery in our culinary marketing campaigns. Despite these promotional efforts, and largely due to infrastructure and investment issues shaping the visitor experience, Pennsylvania Avenue remains a largely untapped asset. City investments are needed to change the tide and put this tremendous and uniquely Baltimore asset on the tourism map.

A&E District establishment is one way in which the City can take action and extend the positive and catalytic benefits experienced in other A&E Districts to Pennsylvania Avenue and its surrounding neighborhoods. Those benefits include (but are not limited to) the attraction of additional investments, businesses and residents through the special tax credits and incentive programs noted in CB 19-0141R.

In a city that is predominantly African American and has a rich history of arts and culture, the opportunity associated with an arts district dedicated to Black culture is tremendous. Visit Baltimore offers its full support of this Resolution and pledges to be an active promotional partner in the outcome.

Submitted respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Al Hutchinson", written over a light blue horizontal line.

Al Hutchinson
President & CEO