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**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF BILL# 25-0036**

Property Taxes – Baltimore City Payment in Lieu of Taxes Task Force

TO: Chair McCray, Vice Chair Schleifer, and Members of the Budget & Appropriations Committee

FROM: Rebecca Schachter

My name is Rebecca Schachter, and I live in Baltimore City Council District 7. I'm writing today to testify in support of Council Bill 25-0036: Baltimore City Payment in Lieu of Taxes Task Force, and to urge the committee to return a favorable report with no weakening amendments.

For the past seven years, I've worked at Johns Hopkins University as an undergraduate financial aid advisor. So, I am intimately acquainted with the extraordinary financial resources that Hopkins is lucky enough to have, as well as with the incredible, transformative impact it can have when we use those resources generously and equitably. Every day, my colleagues and I change students' lives when we're able to offer them the financial aid that makes it possible for them to attend Hopkins, and I'm so proud of the work that we do, and grateful that we have the funding with which to do it. But I also know that we can be more generous and equitable towards the amazing Baltimore community to which we belong.

When prospective students visit Hopkins, my wonderful colleagues in our admissions office never hesitate to tell them what a fantastic city Baltimore is. We boast that our students are active citizens of Baltimore, and that our campus is not just in the city, but of the city - that Baltimore is a key part of who we are and what we do as an institution. How much more true could that be if Hopkins contributed a fair share towards the cost of making our beautiful city run? We love to talk about all the wonderful events that happen here - and how much more wonderful would it be if our contribution helped support stronger public transit, to make those events more accessible? When parents express concerns about whether their students will be safe in Baltimore, we are always quick to reassure them - and how much stronger would those reassurances be, if we helped more to provide for the public safety programs our city needs? At our best, Hopkins and Baltimore can have a productive, mutually beneficial partnership; I support this bill because I believe it will make that partnership stronger.

Of course, as a university employee, I also know that these are difficult times for higher education. Funding cuts from a federal government hostile to free expression, academic inquiry, diversity and inclusion, and so many of the other values that we in Baltimore hold dear, pose a real challenge for institutions like Hopkins - and I don't deny that! But I would argue that this makes establishing a fair PILOT agreement now *more* important, not less. When the administration comes for the services and freedoms that Baltimore residents rely on and deserve, our city needs the resources, and the funding, to fight back, and to protect our most vulnerable community members - many of whom are employees or students or patients at the very institutions in question. Moreover, developing a fair PILOT agreement through a transparent and democratic process will help to demonstrate that, while the rule of law and the rights of citizens to influence their government may no longer be respected on a federal level, here in Baltimore, they are still strong. And when Hopkins and our other anchor institutions make larger, fairer PILOT payments, they won't be losing that money - they'll be contributing it towards our common good, throwing their lots in with the rest of us who call this city home. Here in Baltimore, we know that we are stronger together.

For all of these reasons, and for so many more - from the streets outside my home and the park around the corner that could be better maintained, to the students in Baltimore city schools who could receive a more robust education - and hopefully have a chance to attend Hopkins, or another one of our city's excellent universities someday - I respectfully urge this committee to support Bill 25-0036, to form a PILOT task force here in Baltimore city, without any weakening amendments. Thank you so much for your time and your thoughtful consideration.