



Odette Ramos

Baltimore City Councilwoman

District 14

(410) 396 - 4814

odette.ramos@baltimorecity.gov

100 N. Holliday Street, Room 553

Baltimore MD 21202

September 18, 2025

Testimony

**25-0040 – Zoning – Uses – Small Box Establishment
SUPPORT with Amendments**

Dear Chair Dorsey and Members of the Land Use and Transportation Committee:

I am writing to ask for your support for City Council Bill 25-0040 – Zoning – Uses – Small Box Establishment. I am grateful for the leadership of Vice President Middleton on this bill and the opportunity to work with her on it.

This bill creates a new class of uses in all C zone categories called Small Box Establishment. This is in the same spirit as any other use listed in the zoning code. Our bill then requires that Small Box Establishment uses are a conditional use by board in the zoning code, and requires ½ mile distance between any other property with the same use. Last, this bill requires that if the use is abandoned at any time, that the use then is removed from the property in 30 days and not 2 years after the use is abandoned.

Our communities, particularly Black communities, are inundated with these kinds of stores, and in fact in Council Vice President Middleton's district, there are some right next to each other. These are discount stores that sell very discounted items that are owned by large chains. Our experience is that they are badly managed, and not good community partners. Moreover, they can be predatory claiming that they sell things at discount, but they are smaller amounts for a similar price as Grocery stores. The idea here is to make sure that there is a conversation with the community and the store, which is the point making sure this kind of use goes through the conditional use by board hearing process.

The General Assembly passed legislation to provide a study regarding the impact of those stores. The study was completed by Johns Hopkins University and team and is provided as an attachment to this testimony. In it, you will find that the impact of these stores is negative in the community.

We have been working with the Law Department on their suggested amendments and have taken some of them, not all of them. Below is a summary of the attached amendments:

- Amendment 1 suggested by Law places small box stores in the building code as needing a Use permit.
- Amendment 2 also suggested by Law changes the original definition of small box stores so that we are working with all discount stores and not just the large chains as originally drafted.
- Amendment 3 suggested by Law clarifies the definition of "grocery store" as one of the exceptions.

- Amendment 4 removes the language about ending the conditional use right away. As much as we would like to do that, the Law Department will not approve for form and legal sufficiency. Law does not want us to treat small box stores differently in the conditional use discontinuance section than any other use.

Thank you for your consideration. I can be reached on 410-396-4814 or via email at odette.ramos@baltimorecity.gov should you have any further questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Odette', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Odette Ramos
Baltimore City Councilwoman, District 14