My name is James Biddle, I am a resident of District 12, Station North. Thank you to the Committee for creating this Ordinance which will achieve a more streamlined response to nuisance parking by auto repair businesses.

In my personal experience, the combination of the existing laws and enforcement levels are inadequate in preventing long term abuse of public space. While an airing of grievances against a business is not a productive use of this committee’s time, I believe it is important to briefly highlight my personal experience with nuisance dumping, and how Baltimore may move forward with long-term solutions to the problem.

In my neighborhood, there is an auto repair shop occupying an entire city block of metered parking spaces *and* an entire alley with crashed and disassembled cars. This block is adjacent to restaurants on Charles Street such as Orto and Alma, which are denied much-needed parking for delivery and carry out orders. Junked cars from this business also hinder the passage of garbage trucks and emergency vehicles in the alley. The block directly feeds into the Jones Falls Trail which has recently seen high bike and pedestrian use. Bicycle traffic is pinched on a blind curve to oncoming traffic due to obstructing vehicles stored in public space, and broken glass from crashed cars in the parking lane causes frequent tire punctures and has injured dogs while people are out for a walk to the trail. The business has stored open containers of motor oil on the sidewalk, and an oil slick is easily seen coming from the vicinity during a storm.

This well-used block has significant quality of life issues directly caused by nuisance parking. However, residents are not given a clear path to remediating the issue. The average response time for my DOT Abandoned Vehicle service requests was over 80 days. That was enough time for the shop to replace the junked car in the parking spot with a different one. Since the new junked car did not match the description on the service request, every single report was “gone on arrival”. HCD does not currently offer a service request type that completely addresses the problem. Because the shop uses hourly metered spots, the cars are frequently ticketed. However, the shop considers ticketing the cost of doing business, and the problems remain.

If this bill is approved, the workgroup has many options to fix the issue. As suggested by the bill, a business license will collect data, standardize acceptable practices, and raise funds. I would like to point out that parking revenue down to $2 million a month, whereas before it was $6-8 million a month. There is most likely no budget for more inspectors, but what if a vehicle or property inspector opened a “nuisance parking investigation” for a specific business, and different agencies could collect info in one place over time. That investigation could also be opened on the suggestion of a councilperson or community organization. Fines resulting from chronic abuse of public space should be steep enough to curb behavior and compensate the city. If a business does not have the space to house its vehicles on site, they should be directed to acquire properly zoned vacant land for overflow. Alternatively, businesses could pay high fees for the use of adjacent public space if certain conditions are met relating to the general upkeep of the vicinity.

Before any of these fixes are implemented, we must have agencies come together to determine the best course of action. This bill will accomplish this, and be the first important step in improving the quality of life for city residents and Baltimore’s fiscal situation.