



OUR MISSION:

Working to enhance the economic prosperity of greater Silver Spring through robust promotion of our member businesses and unrelenting advocacy on their behalf.

June 19, 2024

The Honorable Andrew Friedson
and Members of the Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue, Sixth Floor
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Dear Council President Friedson and Members of the Council:

On behalf of the Greater Silver Spring Chamber of Commerce, representing more than 300 employers, mostly small businesses and non-profit organizations in greater Silver Spring and surrounding areas in Montgomery County, we would like to ask, once again, that the Council support the MOVE Act that Councilmember Glass proposed. We would like to thank the Council for recognizing the overall importance of economic development and investing in mechanisms to entice business to come to Montgomery County and to grow and maintain their homes here. This kind of focused initiative will pay dividends long into our county's future. The GSSCC also believes that promoting commerce and economic development is the job of everyone and sees this legislation being presented by the Council Economic Development Committee as a step in the right direction. And look forward to seeing it passed and implemented.

I would like to get a bit more specific about what this initiative can do for Silver Spring. The Chamber has always been about making greater Silver Spring a thriving business community, a place where people want to live, work, and come to enjoy what so many of us love about Silver Spring – our wonderful arts and entertainment venues, our breweries, urban wineries, our diverse restaurants, and our outdoor gathering spaces.

Silver Spring, like other communities in our County, has faced challenges brought on by the pandemic and the subsequent changes in our workforce habits. A lack of boots on the ground, the closing of businesses, and the loss of jobs has hurt our local businesses and our general overall economy. The mission of the Silver Spring Chamber is to widen opportunities by growing jobs and businesses to increase prosperity for all, and a major challenge we continue to face is the high vacancies in our downtown office market. Particularly in some larger footprints in the central business district.

Attracting new companies and fostering business expansion for our existing companies is vitally important and the MOVE Act will help jumpstart local economies with the expansion of the program's eligibility from businesses looking to locate into the county to also include those that want to expand their office space within the county; removing the 20,000 square footage cap to qualify for the program; and increasing the maximum funding award from \$80,000 to \$150,000.

Having said all of this, the GSSCC would like to suggest a few amendments or adjustments to some of the parameters as written at present. A problem we are seeing and that is perhaps, yet again, unique to Silver Spring, is that the landlords with vacancies in more desirable locations in the County aren't necessarily looking for new businesses outside the County to fill their voids, but are instead, in essence, "pouching" tenants from Silver Spring and Wheaton. We unfortunately have several examples to share.

We understand this is part of market competition. Unfortunately, history tells us that when there is vacancy and office movement in the DC, Bethesda and Silver Spring office markets, Silver Spring is the last market tenants

8601 Georgia Avenue, Suite 203, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910
Phone (301)565-3777 • Fax (301)565-3377 • shelsing@gsscc.org • www.gsscc.org

turn to. The Chamber is concerned that by the time tenants' start looking at moving to Silver Spring, it will be well past the current timeframe the MOVE ACT is designed to aid. By that time, the Silver Spring office market will be much worse.

Our Question is, can the Move ACT be enhanced to also help Landlords (especially in areas like Silver Spring and Wheaton) retain their tenants? The suggestion would be that existing tenants would be eligible for the benefits of the MOVE ACT if they sign a lease extension for at least 3 years.

A second question/suggestion is to receive the benefits of the MOVE ACT, can tenants be required to use Montgomery County businesses when moving into the area? The GSSCC thinks that the County providing new tenants a list of local vendors and having the tenants provide proof that they engaged in soliciting services from 3-5 vendors prior to receiving the MOVE ACT assistance, would be a good starting point.

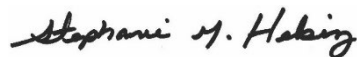
Lastly, is there a way to funnel some of the financial support to the restaurant industry? We have a number of owners/operators who would love to expand in the area and this funding could help them to expand and create new jobs in the hospitality industry.

In summation, the Chamber wants all businesses to succeed, and we believe that codifying this incentive under the Economic Development Fund begins to address some of the challenges faced by Silver Spring businesses. Business growth and development is ultimately the key to a thriving community, a thriving Silver Spring, a thriving County, and a thriving Maryland. This is one more step that assists Silver Spring in taking its rightful place as a business and residential hub, and economic engine in Montgomery County for those who live here, who work here, and who come here to enjoy the wonderful amenities we have to offer. Thank you to the Council for understanding the need for **more intentional economic development tools** and taking action to address it.

We appreciate the opportunity to weigh in on this and look forward to working hand in hand with the Council and the MCEDC on this initiative.

Should you have questions, don't hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,



Stephanie Helsing
President & CEO
Greater Silver Spring Chamber of Commerce

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