



February 27, 2018

Michael Gill, Secretary
Maryland Dept. of Commerce
World Trade Center Baltimore
401 East Pratt Street
Baltimore, MD 21202 - 3316

Kenneth Holt, Secretary
Maryland Dept. of Housing and Community Development
7800 Harkins Road
Lanham, MD 20706

Dear Secretary Gill and Secretary Holt:

The Opportunity Zones development program created under the federal Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 provides a new tool to encourage long-term private investment in low-income communities across Maryland. **The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) is writing to request a public process, specifically including county government input, for determining which among the state's census tracts are to be designated as Opportunity Zones.**

The Act grants governors the authority to nominate low-income census tracts within their states to be designated as Opportunity Zones. As MACo understands it, the process in Maryland will involve the two of you, as the Secretaries of Commerce and Housing and Community Development, submitting recommendations to Governor Hogan for consideration and final decision-making. Absent a decision to include either a public hearing or a comment period, this process would occur without any public input.

County governments have a close and special knowledge of the communities that fall under their jurisdiction and a significant stake in the census tracts to be selected. They have helpful information about the specific areas of need, local priorities, land use planning, and local projects or investments that may help inform the decision-making process. A public process, affording local governments—as well as their economic and community development partners—the ability to share their valuable knowledge could substantially improve the effectiveness of the Opportunity Zones designated across our state.

The federal timeline does not afford a lengthy window for public input, but we request that you build in an opportunity for county governments and other stakeholders to respond to a draft proposal before it is submitted. Either a structured comment period or a public hearing could accomplish these worthy objectives.

MACo thanks you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Sanderson'.

Michael Sanderson
Executive Director, MACo

CC: Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio, Deputy Chief of Staff, Office of the Governor
Kristal Hartsfield, Director of Intergovernmental Relations, Office of the Governor