



THE MARYLAND MUNICIPAL LEAGUE
The Association of Cities and Towns

PRESS RELEASE

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MML Priority Bills Heard in Senate Last Week; Both Seek New Authority

(February 3, 2024) Annapolis, Md. – The [Maryland Municipal League](https://www.mdmunicipal.org/) (MML), representing 160 local governments, testified in favor of two new local authorities last week. On Wednesday, local government leaders joined Senator Cory McCray in support of SB 324, which would enable local jurisdictions to adopt a local food and beverage fee. Later in the week, MML leadership and municipal police representatives joined Senator Will Smith in support of SB 390, which if passed, will allow non-officer staff to certify speed camera violations with appropriate training.



In the push for SB 324, Sen. McCray’s panel included representatives from MML, the Maryland Association of Counties (MACo), and the City of Baltimore. “When I go home, I don’t want my fire departments closed. I want good police services. I want good roads. I want good education. And these are the folks on the ground delivering that each and every day,” opened the bill’s sponsor, Sen. McCray. “We as leaders have to figure out these complex puzzles, and this is their effort – collectively – to say hey, here’s a funding mechanism so we can possibly do that.”

The bill, if successful, would allow counties and municipalities to levy up to a 3% fee on prepared food and beverage sold for on-site consumption. MML CEO Theresa Kuhns shared “Maryland’s municipalities have not received a meaningful revenue structure change since 1967, and the burden of revenue raising falls on Maryland’s residents through property taxes.... It is simply not sustainable.”

Michael O’Connor, MML President and Mayor of the City of Frederick elaborated on the pressures of municipal dependency on property taxes: “Our homeowners, are the ones who remind us daily about the burden of property taxation. What we’re asking for is the opportunity to spread where that obligation can come from... [SB 324] allows local governments to sit down with their tourism and food and beverage providers and have that conversation in local council chambers.”

The hearing also highlighted the solution this is commonplace in the rest of the country, noting that 45 states and the District of Columbia either share or provide a local option for sales and use tax; or levy a local food and beverage fee. D.C. adds 4% to their sales tax for food and beverages Virginia adds up to 4% at the county level, while municipalities are uncapped, some with rates as high as 7.5% on top of their 6% sales tax.



On Friday, the League was back in the Senate for SB 390 which would allow jurisdictions to utilize trained civilian technicians to review speed camera citations, a measure intended to free up officers to prioritize traditional law enforcement duties and allow trained employees to review citations, much like the Maryland red camera citation program, which has been in place since 1997.

Bill sponsor Senator Smith shared data from law enforcement agencies who are having to do “more and more” but with “less and less” of them, citing over 1000 current vacancies throughout the State of Maryland in its 150 law enforcement agencies. “This bill will incorporate not only a new training requirement but will be a force multiplier for law enforcement to do their work,” testified Chairman Will Smith, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee.

“What we’re asking for is some consistency in the area of automated enforcement,” testified Mayor O’Connor. In his presentation, Mayor O’Connor shared that the city has a part-time technician to review their automated red-light program and supports a nearby municipality without a law enforcement agency.

“This is especially critical right now with us struggling with recruiting and retention still,” said Chief of Police Russ Hamill, City of Laurel during his remarks. “... This will make sure we’re enhancing our community safety by having our officers out doing what they were trained to do.”

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About The Maryland Municipal League:

The Maryland Municipal League (MML) was founded in 1936 and serves as the collective voice of 160 municipal governments and the 2 million Marylanders it represents. A voluntary, non-profit, nonpartisan association controlled and maintained by city and town governments, MML works to strengthen and support municipal government through advocacy and the development of effective leadership. Through its membership in the National League of Cities MML offers legislative representation in Washington, urban research programs, and a national municipal government information exchange. MML is the only statewide organization in Maryland composed solely of municipal officials and devoted to the promotion of all branches of municipal administration