

Good evening Senators and Delegates and thank you for the opportunity to speak tonight. My name is Ian Kennedy and I am the president of Save Merriweather, a grassroots organization committed to the preservation of Merriweather Post Pavilion as an outdoor venue for the performing arts. I am here to express my support for the proposed county Revenue Authority.

Before I go any further, I would like to say that my support for the Revenue Authority extends well beyond its potential role in the Merriweather situation. I am first a resident of Howard County who wants only what is best for my community, and I believe that such an entity is certainly in the best interests of this county. Furthermore, I hope that in deciding whether to support this measure, you too consider it without regard to the contentious issue of Merriweather.

Revenue authorities fill the gap between the public and private sectors. They provide necessary public goods, but do so without the burden of taxes. Citizens aren't forced to pay the debt caused by a project that only a few will use. Some may argue, then, that the private sector should provide those community amenities desired by this small minority, and in many cases they'd be right. However, the private sector fails to adequately supply goods when sufficient capital is lacking, when their returns on investment aren't high enough, or when prices cannot be placed on all of the benefits provided by a facility.

The perfect illustration of this point is a parking garage in Ellicott City. A private firm with sufficient capital could construct such a facility and charge patrons a fee for use. However, the garage would create benefits beyond additional parking, such as improved traffic flow and better sight lines to shops along the road. The owners of the garage would be providing these benefits to society free of charge, which lowers the value of their investment—clearly a bad business decision.

In addition to its role as a provider of semi-public goods, a revenue authority could assist public and quasi-public agencies in the county by entering into partnerships, something that Montgomery County's revenue authority regularly does. Under this arrangement, important public projects like health clinics, office buildings, treatment centers and even parks can be financed through user fees, not tax revenue.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not mention Merriweather. I'll simply say that such facilities suffer from the low returns that scare away many private sector firms. While it has been shown by the County Finance Director that Merriweather would pay for itself without encumbering taxpayers, the pavilion is by no means a money tree. Instead, it gets by because of strong support from the public, and this support is largely due to its role as a community resource. In the age of consolidated media, outdoor pavilions are attractive only to those conglomerates that vertically integrate the entertainment industry. These firms own the artists, the radio stations, the advertising, and the venues. They homogenize the arts, and by extension us, and are plagues on the free market and consumer choice. By allowing quasi-public ownership of the pavilion, we preserve our history and the uniqueness of our community.

Thank you.