

July 12, 2021

City Solicitor James L. Shea  
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Solicitor Shea:

On behalf of thousands of taxpayers and residents across the city of Baltimore, we urge you to carefully consider the findings of the oversight panel set to convene on July 13. Additionally, we urge you to support critical reforms that would make the Office of the Inspector General (IG) truly independent from the Baltimore city government. Chaired by City Solicitor Jim Shea, the panel presents an opportunity for Baltimore to rein in the wasteful spending and rampant corruption that has unfortunately held the city back. But the convening of the panel also raises the disturbing possibility that city leadership will turn this “oversight” exercise into a crusade against accountability and oversight. For the sake of Baltimore’s future, it is crucial that politics not be allowed to hijack this important process. The city deserves a clean break with the troubles of the past, not an attack on the independence of the IG.

Ever since assuming her role as IG, Isabel Mercedes Cumming has fought hard for a better Baltimore. Right off the bat, she boldly declared, “nobody is off limits. Overtime situations, theft of time. Purchase cards. There are so many areas that need to be looked at...I love going after white collar criminals.” Then-mayor Catherine Pugh praised her remarks, unaware that Cumming would soon help unearth the executive’s many misdeeds. An investigation by the IG and federal authorities quickly revealed Pugh’s involvement in pay-to-play schemes, including trading inflated purchases of her book “Healthy Holly” for political favors. It is not easy to take on powerful vested interests in a large city such as Baltimore, but IG Cumming’s efforts ensured that Pugh would face justice.

Fortunately for Baltimore residents, Cumming’s efforts have not stopped at the mayor’s office. In 2020, her office released a report detailing a shady master lease agreement with Columbia-based finance firm Grant Capital Management (GCM). The company continued to curry favor with the city of Baltimore despite GCM’s false affidavits and campaign irregularities. Cumming also spearheaded an investigation into the many dubious activities of Baltimore City State's Attorney Marilyn Mosby. Cumming and her team found that Mosby’s extensive travel schedule ran afoul of reporting requirements set forth in the city’s Administrative Manual. Mosby forcefully pushed back against the findings and insisted that taxpayers were not financing her lavish trips despite plenty of evidence to the contrary. Yet through all of these struggles,

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Cumming has stood her ground and refused to apologize for unearthing Mosby's tendency to flout the rules.

Now, the city of Baltimore has an opportunity to voice a vote of confidence in IG Cumming and use their upcoming panel to solicit consensus on much-needed reforms. If done right, the panel could provide a stark contrast to the sorry state of affairs in Baltimore County. Recently, Baltimore County Executive Johnny Olszewski tried unsuccessfully to muzzle County IG Kelly Madigan and end the IG's independence.

Madigan recently exposed the misspending of taxpayer funds by William "Chris" McCollum, a public official who is well-connected to Olszewski's election committee. A combination of meticulous media coverage and sound IG reporting led to McCollum's resignation as deputy director at the Department of Economic and Workforce Development. It is little surprise, then, that county officials attempted to retaliate against the government watchdog. The anti-IG legislation was fortunately pulled from consideration, but similar action against Madigan is likely in the future.

Now is the time for Baltimore city officials to listen to their own IG and make sure that politics does not get in the way of reform, transparency, and accountability. City leadership should use the July 13 panel as an opportunity to read through the IG's reporting and work to improve a deeply troubled city.

Sincerely,



David Williams  
President

Cc:

Michael Huber  
Erika McClammy  
Sharon Middleton  
Eric Costello  
Donald Tobin  
Ronald Weich