

NEWS RELEASE

HOWARD COUNTY COUNCIL

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Councilmembers Jones & Rigby File Legislation to Improve County Auditor Processes

Ellicott City, MD (March 6, 2023) – Howard County Councilmembers Opel Jones and Christiana Rigby are set to late file legislation for introduction tonight. The legislation will amend the Howard County Code to establish official and public processes for audits by the Howard County Auditor’s Office.

The legislation will be late filed for introduction this evening, in response to actions by the Auditor and the Lead Investigator in a recent investigation, as well as the most recent report published by the Auditor’s Office. The audit report addressed an alleged misuse of County funds by the Howard County Library System. Subsequently, concerns regarding transparency, accountability, and equity in our government were raised by members of the community, local leaders, and established organizations.

The new legislation requires the Howard County Auditor’s Office to meet with the County Council and outline the scope of an audit prior to beginning their investigation. This includes informing the Council of allegations and known facts, rationale for the audit, audit standards, timeline of the audit, witnesses that will be interviewed, and other information the Council may require. Further, before the Auditor’s Office publishes the final audit report to the public, they are required to meet with the County Council to discuss the preliminary draft and findings. The legislation brings clarity and includes the Council in the process of conducting audits.

“As I continue to call for the termination of the Auditor and Lead Investigator, it is imperative to further define and explicitly state what the Auditor and their staff can and cannot do in Howard County,” said Councilmember Jones. “We have amazing and dedicated law enforcement entities who should be the personnel to complete surveillance of locations, events and/or citizens. This is not the responsibility of the Auditor’s Office.”

Currently the duties of the Auditor's Office are outlined in Section's 212 and 213 in the Howard County Charter. This legislation would create a new County Auditor subtitle in the Howard County Code. The new subtitle allows for this policy, and any future policies pertaining to the County Auditor.

"Increasing transparency in government is crucial to regaining our community's trust and respect," said Councilmember Rigby. "This legislation creates a system of checks and balances, formal oversight, and accountability with the Auditor's Office."

The legislation is being considered as a late filed bill. In order for the legislation to be considered this month, four Councilmembers must vote to add it to the legislative agenda at the Legislation Session tonight. If added, the legislation will be read tonight, and testimony will be accepted at the Public Hearing on March 20th at 7:00pm. Howard County residents may sign up to testify by visiting <https://apps.howardcountymd.gov/otestimony/> .

Councilmembers Jones and Rigby encourage community members to submit written testimony in support by emailing councilmail@howardcountymd.gov.

To read CB11-2023, please visit <https://apps.howardcountymd.gov/olis/LegislationDetail.aspx?LegislationID=13231>.

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