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January 21, 2025

Dear Harford County Council,

Friends of Harford, representing the citizens' voice for responsible land use, is dedicated to safeguarding and improving the quality of life for all Harford County residents. We oppose Bill 24-041, which proposes amending Chapter 267 of the Harford County Code to align the county's quarry extraction and blasting regulations with the less protective standards outlined in COMAR Title 26. This bill weakens safeguards for residents and overlooks the unique needs and circumstances of Harford County.

The proposed changes to reduce setback requirements disregard concerns raised by citizens in Harford County Board of Appeals cases, including Case No. 529 (Arundel Quarry), Case No. 5806 (Vulcan Construction Materials, LP), Case No. 3303 (Arundel Sand & Gravel Modification), and several others. These cases reflect persistent opposition to quarry operations due to blasting vibrations disrupting homes, excessive noise, environmental damage, increased truck traffic, and declining property values. Communities adjacent to the operation such as Meadowvale and the Meadowvale Elementary could face greater risks from reduced setbacks that compromise community safety and overall quality of life.

Harford County's zoning regulations (§267-63) define the Critical Area as land and water within 1,000 feet of the Chesapeake Bay and its tidal tributaries, with measures to protect water quality, wildlife habitats, and ecosystems. The Critical Area Buffer, vital for environmental preservation, could be at risk if setback rules are reduced. The county has demonstrated its commitment to protecting these resources through legislative updates to the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area Program, stressing the need to assess the impacts of any setback changes.

We are further concerned that Bill 24-041 prioritizes the interests of quarry operators over the well-being of Harford County residents. Significant changes like these should adhere to the criteria outlined in the special exception process, ensuring that quarry operations do not adversely impact the health, safety, or welfare of nearby communities, or degrade natural resources. The decision-making process must include meaningful community engagement and transparency to address potential negative impacts on neighborhoods, such as increased noise, dust, and industrial activity. Harford County residents deserve a voice in decisions that directly affect their safety, property, and environment, rather than having their quality of life dictated solely by State law (COMAR).

Friends of Harford requests the council reject Bill 24-041 and maintain stricter local controls to protect the residents and environment of Harford County. Thank you for your time and attention to this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Flasch  
Friends of Harford