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Dear Colleagues:

I would like to express my thoughts regarding recent communications which all of us participated in as members of the Garrett County, Allegany County, or Washington County delegations regarding instituting the process to potentially have these three western counties leave the State of Maryland and join the State of West Virginia. I believe that our intentions have been misconstrued, and that in fact the entire effort may be foolhardy. While this letter reflects only my own perspective, Senator Edwards and I have communicated that he shares my ultimate conclusion and would similarly withdraw any participation in any further efforts in this process.

Due to a variety of factors, I frankly was not in a position to give this initiative my full attention over the last week and believe that I did not have the opportunity to truly analyze the various documents or their import. As you are aware, I did not personally attend any meetings with or engage in communications with our West Virginia counterparts. I am not in support of attempting to institute any process at this time to facilitate any transfer of Allegany County to West Virginia.

I did indicate that I could support a *non-binding* referendum for the voters of the three western counties to have an opportunity to express their opinions as to whether or not they would like to see further efforts pursued with the ultimate goal of being able to join the State of West Virginia. I would not support any legislative efforts or other efforts to attempt to make such a maneuver without a full public referendum of the three counties having previously occurred. I believe, clearly, that we have allowed ourselves to move too far, too fast on this issue, motivated by the political calendar of our counterparts in West Virginia rather than by a prudent strategy.

As we all are aware, many of the policies that emanate from our General Assembly make the prospects of growth and prosperity for Western Maryland extremely difficult. It is very common for many of our citizens and businesses to look south or west to the few areas of West Virginia that have experienced some growth and prosperity, including the Morgantown area and Martinsburg region, and believe that we too could succeed if freed from the political control of metropolitan Maryland. My consent to have my name added to the letter sent to the West Virginia authorities and to participate in this effort was predicated only upon what I believe we were intending to do: propose possible legislation seeking a *non-binding* referendum to get the will of the people in Western Maryland on this issue better defined. It is now apparent that this effort goes farther than my limited intentions, and that it has created mischaracterizations and grave concerns from voices across Maryland. That was not my intention and I suspect was never any of yours.

Senator Edwards and I have spent the better part of the last two years co-chairing the Task Force on the Economic Future of Western Maryland. Last year we introduced a series of bills in the legislature design to create additional economic initiatives and funding streams for the three western counties in an effort to bring us more in line economically with the I-95 corridor communities, as well as enable us to facilitate meaningful population growth for the region. These objectives are, to me, the primary reason why any of us should serve in office from our region. Without economic development, the creation of 21st-century jobs and industries, and substantive population growth, Western Maryland cannot thrive and succeed for future generations. Senator Edwards and I have been engaged in conversations with the Hogan Administration about their direct support for several of these initiatives, and I remain optimistic that Governor Hogan, who has been an ally and a partner in many projects to attempt to help Western Maryland over the past seven years, will make these initiatives a priority in his final year in office.

As part-time legislators, we all understand that it is difficult to invest all of your time, energies and resources into every legislative issue or political debate. I honestly believe that all of our efforts from now until the conclusion of the legislative session would be best spent focusing on garnering support for the legislative and budgetary initiatives of the Task Force, as well as other ideas from each of you as independent legislators designed to help make Western Maryland a more attractive place for job creation and for families to live and work. Attempting to facilitate this idea of initiating the process to transfer the three western counties from Maryland to West Virginia is merely a distraction from these more important objectives. In my opinion, it is extraordinarily unlikely that any such effort would ever be successful from either a legal or a political standpoint. This initiative was, from my perspective, essentially a plea for help to our colleagues in Annapolis and to others across the State to encourage them to recognize the fierce urgency of now with respect to supporting economic development and growth initiatives for our three western counties, as well as recognizing that perhaps it is time to take a pause on enacting policies that have a

disproportionate negative impact on our communities, whether they be from a tax, regulatory, or business standpoint. After fully considering the issue, however, I do not believe that this initiative will serve to rally support to our cause, but rather only serve to alienate those who may not understand nor appreciate the realities and the nearly insurmountable obstacles to growth and prosperity in our region that Annapolis often creates.

Those of you who know me well know that I do not particularly enjoy politics. My goal in serving in the Maryland General Assembly and frankly in serving in a leadership role within our House Republican Caucus is to attempt to facilitate policies and initiatives that are feasible, tangible, and can be enacted to improve the lives of our citizens in Western Maryland and our future generations. In all candor, I myself would not personally wish to leave the State of Maryland to relocate to West Virginia. While I have much affection for many of our neighbors to the south and appreciate their policies on energy and natural resources, the Second Amendment, public safety, and taxation in general, I am a Marylander, for better or for worse, and to the extent I would ever choose to leave the State, it would likely be personally for a climate or opportunity in a wholly different region of our great nation. I believe that this initiative and the publicity surrounding it (whether accurate or not), is in fact counterproductive to my goals in serving the people of Allegany County and of the State of Maryland as a member of the House of Delegates.

In sum, I would request that in any future communications my name not be included in support of this initiative. I have the utmost respect for each of you and I know that you all have nothing but the best interests of your constituents in mind in connection with this issue or with any other. For me, I simply believe that this effort is misguided and that it is not worthwhile for me to participate in it. I urge each of you to exercise your own conscience as I know you will, and encourage all of us to come together over this next legislative session to work with the Hogan Administration and with other colleagues in Annapolis of both parties on a comprehensive, intelligent and substantive package of legislative and budgetary initiatives for the betterment of Western Maryland's future. Senator Edwards and I have communicated and he joins me in these sentiments with respect to this initiative and we hope that it puts to rest any concerns that the initiative will be meaningfully pursued going forward. It is my understanding that other members of the Washington County delegation are exploring similar positions.

Very truly yours,



Delegate Jason C Buckel

Very truly yours,



Senator George Edwards