

**Baltimore Green Justice
Workers Cooperative**

www.greenjusticeworkers.org

**Testimony to the Legislative Investigations Committee regarding Legislative
Oversight: LO23-0031**

In the last Baltimore election in 2022, **76.67% of residents in Baltimore City voted in support of Question E.** *Question E was for the purpose of prohibiting the sale, transfer, or franchising of the City's underground conduit system for cables, wires, and similar facilities.*

Baltimore voters said "NO!" Still, Mayor Brandon Scott signed off on a deal to transfer control of the City's conduit system to BGE. This decision by Mayor Scott and his Executive Administration not only violates our nation's democratic process which ensures citizens the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making; but it is a flagrant disrespect to Baltimore City voters who trust Mayor Scott to adhere to the democratic principles for which this nation and our City were founded.

A recent report by the Baltimore City Department of Transportation explained "Municipal ownership of the conduit system yields a number of benefits" for City to retain control of the conduit system. "The system generates sizable revenue... [which] must be invested back into the system... **Municipal ownership also provides city government control of who's in our system, who ultimately constructs the system, and where infrastructure improvements are made. Lastly, preserving municipal ownership of the conduit system provides Baltimore a unique opportunity and potential path towards the implementation of municipal broadband.**"

Mayor Scott's decision to relinquish control of the City's conduit system to BGE might be a quick and easy fix; however, **it is NOT the best or smartest solution for our City.**

Relinquishing control of the City's conduit system at a time when the Biden and Moore Administrations are disbursing millions of dollars and infrastructure investment to cities like Baltimore where an overwhelming number of residents live in historically marginalized, under-served and disenfranchised communities affected by adverse climate change and other environmental injustices that directly impact the City's conduit system is counterproductive. It is a step backward instead of a step forward!

Relinquishing control of the city conduit to a private company like BGE means that a for profit company would manage the city's electrical, cable, WIFI and phone infrastructures which could result in higher prices for residents, less competitive options for resident and no sense of public protection as BGE's interest as a for profit is dollars and cents not ensuring fair and just protections for residents.

Baltimore City was designated an independent city by the Constitution of Maryland in 1851. As such, it has operated for hundreds of years separate of any county because of the forward thinking of city leaders who envisioned a Baltimore that was self-determined and able to manage its own affairs. In 2023, Baltimore City leadership is well-positioned to think out-side-of the box to manage the City's conduit system without relinquishing responsibility to a private company whose conflict of interest could create economic hardship on residents throughout the City.

It is for these reasons that Members of Baltimore Green Justice Workers Cooperative oppose the decision by Mayor Scott and his Executive Administration to push forward with the transfer of control of the City's conduit system to BGE. I suggest instead that Mayor Scott and his Executive Administration create a task force of stakeholders from all sectors in Baltimore City to work with the consultant retained by his Administration to come up with a better way to resolve the City's conduit system problem that is in the best interest of Baltimore residents, not in the interest of a business conglomerate like BGE.

We also ask that the Board of Estimates, at its meeting next week, affirms the vote of the majority of Baltimore residents, by rejecting the approval request by Mayor Scott and his Executive Administration to transfer control of the City's conduit system to BGE.

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