

Cardin Calls for Detention Center Closure and Land Redistribution

Posted by [TBN](#) On 10/29/2005

The District of Columbia should close its troubled youth detention facility outside Laurel and redistribute its 800 acres of prime real estate to Anne Arundel County and national park and security agencies, Rep. Ben Cardin, D-Baltimore, told a congressional committee Friday.

With the Fort Meade area expanding by 5,000 jobs over the next several years and "substantial growth" expected along the Baltimore-Washington Parkway, Cardin said Maryland needs the land for "environmental, recreational and economic opportunities."

Cardin's proposal, H.R. 316, would mean tearing down the Oak Hill Youth Center -- long criticized for its dilapidated buildings and mismanagement -- and turning over the federal land. It also would mean development revenues would be used to reimburse the federal government for construction costs for a new state-of-the-art youth facility, preferably within Washington's borders.

Under the plan, wetlands west of the Baltimore-Washington Parkway would be transferred to the National Park Service. Land east of the parkway and north of the Little Patuxent River would be used by the National Security Agency headquarters in Ft. Meade. And the largest section, south of the river, would go to the county.

Matt Diehl, an Anne Arundel County spokesman, said County Executive Janet Owens wants a park along the Little Patuxent River, which runs into federal property.

Owens believes the area around the river "is an absolute visual jewel for the citizens of our county," Diehl said.

District Mayor Anthony Williams and the City Council plan to close Oak Hill within four years, said Councilman Adrian Fenty. The idea is to build new, smaller facilities on the same Laurel site, an option strongly opposed by Maryland lawmakers who want to put the land to other use.

"The property cannot be rehabilitated," Cardin told the committee. "The property needs to be knocked down. We need a new facility."

A new facility built within Washington would let juveniles stay closer to their families and the Washington court system, Cardin said.

In addition, the National Security Agency needs to secure its periphery, especially where the juvenile center now stands, Cardin said.

The county also needs additional land for the private development likely to follow Ft. Meade's expansion in the wake of Base Realignment and Closure Commission recommendations, Cardin said.

Built in 1967, the youth center lies in Car