



# ROBERT G. CASSILLY

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Harford County Executive

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Feb. 28, 2024

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## **Councilmember Penman Named as Subject of Harford Ethics Probe; Responds with Outrageous False Attacks on County Executive Cassilly**

**BEL AIR, Md.,** (Feb. 28, 2024) – After being named the subject of a Harford County ethics probe, County Councilmember Aaron Penman has once again made an untrue and outrageous claim attacking the character and integrity of Harford County Executive Bob Cassilly. Penman falsely alleges that the county executive signed a real estate plat submitted on behalf of a Cassilly family member.

County Executive Cassilly did not review and did not sign this plat.

Once a plat - which is a plan for land use - meets all applicable regulations and is approved by county departments, the county executive or his designee is legally obligated to sign it. This is required by the Harford County Code and is not subject to his discretion.

However, because this plat involved a family member, it was not reviewed by County Executive Cassilly. Instead, it was reviewed in due course without any favoritism and signed on his behalf by the director of administration. The plat document clearly shows the director's same handwriting on two signature lines – once on the line for himself as director and again on the line below for the county executive, properly followed by the director's initials.

This false attack is the latest in a year-long line of ridiculous allegations against the county executive by Councilmember Aaron Penman, who was recently notified that he is himself the subject of an ethics probe.

After receiving complaints from citizens, Harford County Attorney Jefferson Blomquist on Monday requested an advisory opinion from the Board of Ethics on potential conflicts of interest for Councilmember Penman, whose legislative duties include voting on the budget for his employer.

Penman works for the Harford County Sheriff's Office, which relies entirely on funding from the county government.

Mr. Blomquist originally sought opinions from the Maryland Office of the Attorney General on both the legal and ethical status of Penman's employment by a county-funded agency while simultaneously voting to approve its budget as a member of the council.

Penman's employer publicly claimed that the AG's office had issued a legal opinion allowing the dual role. However, the AG's office advised Mr. Blomquist in writing that they did not and do not issue opinions on matters of county law and they defer potential violations of the state ethics code to the Maryland State Ethics Commission.

Harford's code of ethics mirrors that of the state.

The county attorney's request for an advisory opinion from the local ethics board centers on the following questions:

- Whether Councilmember Penman's employment disqualifies him from serving on a legislative body that approves the budget for the Harford County Sheriff's Office, which is also his employer;
- Whether Councilmember Penman should remain in office but be disqualified from voting on the county budget overall;
- Whether Councilmember Penman should be disqualified from voting on the Sheriff's Office budget only.

Members of the Harford County Board of Ethics are appointed by the county executive and approved by the County Council.

Harford County's correspondence with the AG's office and request to the Ethics Board are posted on the county website at <https://www.harfordcountymd.gov/DocumentCenter/View/25629>.

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