

Final Op-ed Placed in Washington Post: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/11/04/maryland-most-equitable-spot-new-fbi-headquarters/>

New FBI Headquarters Selection a Matter of Equity

Thanks to the leadership of President Biden, the selection of a location for the new FBI headquarters is once again moving forward, after plans were stalled under former President Trump. However, I am deeply concerned with recent developments in the site selection process that undermine the Biden Administration's commitment to advancing equity.

The process for selecting a new FBI headquarters dates back to 2012, with 35 sites under initial consideration now down to three finalists. Prince George's County has two of the three sites under consideration, in Greenbelt and Landover; the third site is in Springfield, Virginia. Throughout the past decade, the General Services Administration (GSA) has said it would focus on access to transit, cost, and environmental impact when selecting a new site.

Objectively speaking, both Prince George's sites are superior based on the criteria the GSA set in 2012. Our sites include great transit and highway access, access to quality amenities, are ready now for new development, and have proximity to an outstanding workforce as well as an unmatched STEM research ecosystem where the FBI can engage with public and private institutional partners to meet the new cyber threats of the 21st century. And the sites are ready now.

Further, the Greenbelt site offers direct access to Metro, making it the only site that does not increase negative environmental impacts by putting more cars on the road. Because of the amount of space available at Landover, it has unmatched security buffer options. My Administration, Governor Hogan, Maryland State leaders, and our Maryland federal delegation are all in agreement that the two sites in Prince George's remain the best options for a new FBI headquarters.

The GSA recently announced new selection criteria for the FBI headquarters, where proximity to Quantico (VA) was added. It is heavily weighted, and (seemingly) the deciding criterion. It also undermines a key priority of the Biden Administration - advancing equity - which ranked only 4th out of GSA's 5 criteria and has so little weight it barely registers. This is an abrupt change that clearly favors the site in Springfield, and also clearly puts Prince George's at a disadvantage, even though we excel on transit access, sustainability and cost. We strongly believe equity should be prioritized, and we ask that it be given equal consideration along with the other criteria.

Prince George's County is a majority minority community whose population is over three-fifths Black and almost one-fifth Latino, and we have historically missed out on federal investments when it comes to federal office space. While we house 20% of the region's federal workforce, we host less than 5% of the region's federal office space.

Decisions like this are policy decisions that have major, and sometimes generational, impacts on communities. When the Federal Government in 1941 decided to locate the Pentagon on the west bank of the Potomac in Virginia, that policy decision created decades of additional and massive investment in the area. Likewise, the Federal Government's policy decision to locate the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in Montgomery County has had a similar effect. Federal job centers have driven job and income growth in our region, and decisions about where to locate them have historically advantaged majority communities over minority communities like Prince George's.

The results of this lack of investment are clear. Median incomes are 48% lower in Prince George's County compared to Fairfax County (where the Springfield site is located). Out of the largest 150 counties in the country, Fairfax ranks 2nd on their growth of income and wealth over time; Prince George's ranks 142nd. Additionally, even though we have some of the same assets in availability of land and transit access, we have faced obstacles in attracting the same types of private investment that we see in jurisdictions such as Fairfax County and Montgomery County.

The site selection criteria announced by the GSA represent policy decisions, and once again, it appears that some in the Federal Government are seeking to favor investing in the same communities that have historically received the majority of these investments for decades. Meanwhile, it appears communities of color like Prince George's may once again get left behind.

It's time for a change.

The Prince George's sites clearly remain the best positioned to serve as the new home of the FBI headquarters. Our sites would provide the dedicated men and women of the FBI with modern, safe, world-class accommodations as they work daily to protect this nation from its threats. But just as important, locating the headquarters in Prince George's would create long overdue generational transformation and investment.