Uh oh. What's next, Councilperson Bevins? A tax on sunshine?

Hi. On March 18, 2013, 5 members of the Baltimore County Council – **including Councilperson Bevins from District 6** – voted to approve the fee structure for the "Rain Tax" you're now paying. What they could have and should have done is just say, "No!" No to the fees. No to the tax itself.

Just to be clear, the Rain Tax makes little or no sense.

In 2010, the Environmental Protection Agency ordered Maryland to reduce the runoff of rainwater into the Chesapeake Bay. The Maryland solution was to create a tax based on the amount of rainwater that impacts "impervious surfaces" such as your roof, patio and driveway. If you're bald and go out in the rain, they'll probably want to tax your head too. Commercial properties are also taxed. We all call it the "Rain Tax." Maryland is the only state in the United States that taxes rain.

Problem #1. Of the 23 counties and the city of Baltimore, only 9 of those counties – the largest ones by population – and Baltimore city are required to pay the Rain Tax. The Bay is a state resource from which all Marylanders benefit. So, why aren't the people in the other 14 counties paying Rain Taxes too? Doesn't it rain and are there no impervious surfaces in those counties? Why is Baltimore County paying well more than its fair share to protect the Bay from runoff?

Problem #2. Do you really believe that rain falling on someone's driveway in, let's say, Frederick County makes it all the way to the Bay?

Problem #3. As it turns out, each participating county is allowed to set its own Rain Tax fees. So the Rain Tax varies from county to county, from $0 in the 14 counties that have nothing to do with it, to whatever you pay in your county. What's up with that?!

If the Rain Tax is beginning to sound like a huge hot mess, it is. Wait, I think I hear Councilperson Bevins arguing, "Come on, it's not like we're talking serious money here."

"Well, how much, exactly, are we talking about?"

Good question. If you have a detached single family home, you pay $39 per year. A townhouse, $21. Commercial property, $69 per year per "Equivalent Residential Unit." And who is it that will eventually pay those Rain Taxes on commercial properties? We will, because businesses will have no choice but to pass them through to their customers by raising the prices for the products and services they sell.

"Chump change for a good cause." Could that be what Councilperson Bevins was thinking?

Problem #4. If it's only "chump change," it should have been all that much easier for the Council to vote it down. But it's not, "chump change" that is, certainly not in total. According to the EPA, Baltimore County expects to raise $24,540,000 from the tax every year. We all love the Bay, but think about what else we could do with all that money to improve public education, safety, health and other services the county provides us. Maybe, just maybe there are other ways to pay for saving the Bay from rainwater runoff.

Problem #5. Councilperson Bevins. She should have stood up. She should have said something.

At the very least, she should have introduced legislation that would have done in Baltimore County what her counterparts have done in Frederick County – charge a fee of just 1 cent per property. It's a solution that would have sent a message to Annapolis that, while we're all in favor of doing what it takes to protect the Bay from storm water runoff, the Rain Tax is a bad way of paying for it.

Long story short, Councilperson Bevins should have said, "No," as in "No way!" That's what **Jeff Beard** would have done – and what he's going to do as soon as he's elected to the County Council. **Beginning on day one that he's in office – assuming the legislature hasn't already repealed it – Jeff is going to sponsor legislation to amend or repeal Bill No. 20-13.** And when he does, we can all go back to a time, before Councilperson Bevins took office, when a little rain now and then was a good thing, a freebee from Mother Nature for a lawns and flowers.

You have a chance – during early voting beginning June 12 and on election day on June 24 – to significantly improve the effectiveness of your county government. It's simple. All you have to do is vote for **Jeff Beard. B-E-A-R-D.**