

**Testimony of J. Kirby Fowler, Jr.  
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**Before the United States Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works**

**Field Hearing – “GSA and Federal Courthouses:  
Management, Renovation and Construction Issues”**

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Good afternoon. It is my distinct pleasure to be invited to speak before this Senate Committee on the subject of our federal courthouse. I would like to thank Senator Cardin for this privilege, as well as Chairwoman Boxer and Ranking Member Inhofe. We are very grateful for the extraordinary support that Senator Cardin has shown Downtown Baltimore throughout his distinguished career.

My name is Kirby Fowler, President of the Downtown Partnership of Baltimore, an independent nonprofit organization charged with continuing the renaissance of Downtown Baltimore. For more than 25 years, our programs have led to increased investment, improved quality of life, retention of key employers, solutions to transportation challenges, improved parks and green space, and workforce development opportunities. From our daily work tracking the growth of Downtown, we know that the federal courthouse is one of our most critical assets.

The United States government has long recognized the importance of federal facilities within a community and, in particular, has invested in modernizing or replacing courthouses across the country. In cities such as Portland, Oregon, San Francisco, Boston, Tacoma, Denver, and Syracuse, new or redesigned federal properties are dynamic, multi-use destinations that include libraries, public event space, art, gardens, and even cafes and open-air markets. These improved properties are cornerstones of their communities. Their landscaping, environmentally-friendly design, and signature architecture increase the attractiveness of the area around these facilities, improves public perception of the important work that takes place within, and boosts employee attraction, retention, and productivity.

The Federal Courthouse in Downtown Baltimore is incredibly important to the Downtown economy. A substantial number of law firms, government agencies, and court-related businesses are located in the heart of Downtown in large part due to the location of this Federal Courthouse. On a daily basis, people have business in the Federal Courthouse, which spills over into additional revenue for restaurants, retailers, and even parking garages.

Downtown Baltimore is a tremendous location for the court. We rank fifteenth in the country for employment density and, last year, even as the effects of the recession lingered, Downtown Baltimore added 6,700 jobs – the sixth best rate of increase in the country. This growth has occurred throughout Downtown, from the Westside to City Center, from the Inner Harbor to Harbor East. Downtown also ranks eighth in the country for population density, with some of the best educated residents in the nation. In addition to our strong workforce and deep network of businesses that support the courthouse, Downtown is also the most transit-connected district in the region.

For all its positive attributes, the Federal Courthouse suffers from a fortress-like, single use design that minimizes its relevance to the more than 113,000 daytime employees and 41,000 residents that work and live within one mile of the facility. Millions of people pass this building every year, but the nondescript architecture does little to communicate the important judicial business happening here on a daily basis. Despite the many people who work in and use the courthouse each day, its design seals it off from the street and creates a dead zone in the middle of a vital part of our city. I share Senator Cardin's belief that this does not have to be the case. The Federal Courthouse in Baltimore can become an even more important asset.

The Downtown Partnership is charged with creating economic vitality in the heart of our city. We are regularly involved in urban planning and land use issues, capital improvement projects, and business attraction and retention. Earlier this month, we were joined by Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley and Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake to release a Strategic Plan for Downtown Baltimore, a major component of which is a detailed Open Space Improvement Plan. Under the plan, our goal for every property in Downtown is to create multi-use destinations that add visual as well as economic vitality.

Locations exist within mere blocks of the current courthouse that could accommodate a new federal courthouse. For example, Baltimore is in the early stages of planning a new arena building. The site of the current arena would make an ideal location for a new courthouse, in conjunction with new green space to be enjoyed by employees, visitors, and residents.

If renovations to the existing courthouse are preferable, the opportunity is there to completely re-envision how the building interacts with the surrounding neighborhood. Changes continue to come to Pratt Street, our City's grand boulevard, as a result of our Pratt Street Master Plan, adopted by the City in 2008. A redesigned and re-oriented courthouse could serve as a linchpin for greater improvements to the street. And incorporating the latest in green construction would demonstrate Federal leadership and show private property owners the importance of energy-efficient, people-friendly design.

Downtown Partnership has worked closely with Federal agencies, such as the General Services Administration, in programming events, cleaning and maintaining the areas around Federal buildings, and improving the way Downtown looks and feels for everyone doing business with Federal agencies. I sincerely hope that we may continue to work in partnership with the Federal government to help improve its facilities in Downtown Baltimore, and I thank you for your time and consideration.