



February 4, 2020

House Bill 231

Housing Opportunities Made Equal Act

House Environment and Transportation Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on HB 231, which prohibits discrimination in the sale or rent of housing based on a person's source of income. This measure allows any lawful source of funds to be used to purchase or rent housing and is a critical tool in our effort to create fair and equitable housing opportunities for all residents.

Last year, I enacted Anne Arundel County's first fair housing law, which in addition to race, ethnicity, disability and other statuses, included source of income as a protected class. As a result, income from lawful employment, inheritances, pensions, and government assistance - including Housing Choice Vouchers or SSI payments - can be used to pay for housing.

By far, the most controversial aspect of the legislation in Anne Arundel County was including source of income as a protected class, requiring property owners to rent to qualified households who happen to utilize Housing Choice Vouchers. We fought to include this provision because it was the right thing to do. Ninety-eight percent of voucher holders in Anne Arundel County are employed, elderly or have a disability. We know that children who live in households who have more choice in housing location do better in school and have better health outcomes. The source of income provision helps. At the same time, property owners still have the right to screen voucher holders based on credit history and criminal background checks, just like they would any other potential tenants.

And the measure is already having real results. Last fall, dozens of rental households managed by one particular company were told their leases would not be up for renewal because the landlord was no longer going to provide housing to Housing Choice Voucher recipients. They had already forced many families out of their homes. Once our local fair housing law went into effect, those families who had yet to be forced out were allowed to remain. The Housing Commission has seen an increase of new owners and landlords participating in the program and have heard from many that their misconceptions about the program and its burdens have not been realized.

I urge a FAVORABLE report on HB 231.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stuart Pittman", is written over a horizontal line.

Stuart Pittman
County Executive