



**Testimony Concerning HB 231
Housing Opportunities Made Equal Act
House Environment and Transportation Committee**

February 4, 2020

Position: Support

The Community Development Network of Maryland (CDN) is the voice for Maryland's community development sector and serves nearly 200 member organizations. CDN—focuses on small affordable housing developers, housing counseling agencies and community-based non-profits across the state of Maryland. The mission of CDN is to promote, strengthen and advocate for the community development sector throughout Maryland's urban, suburban and rural communities. CDN envisions a state in which all neighborhoods are thriving and where people of all incomes have abundant opportunities for themselves and their families.

HB 231 makes it illegal for a landlord to deny renting to someone based on their source of income. Advocates for affordable housing have seen many cases where a family was denied a lease because they have a Housing Choice Voucher, Social Security Income, or some other non-employment income. Currently it is legal in Maryland to do that. This bill would require landlords take vouchers and other sources of income.

This legislation is critical to deconcentrate poverty across the state. Families with vouchers or other non-employment income are interested in living in areas where there are good schools, access to jobs, transportation, grocery stores and other necessities. Many citizens in this state report that they are unable live in areas of opportunity because landlords and communities perceive that a family with a voucher or other non-employment income is a family that will not take care of the property or not pay rent.

This is far from the truth. As we found during a campaign two years ago, nine out of ten times someone called a housing authority to report the condition of a home or disturbance at a home, that home had a family paying market rent and not using vouchers. Families have to abide by strict rules to obtain and keep their vouchers. Vouchers are very hard to come by and there are huge waiting lists in every part of the state. Many studies have confirmed that there is no connection between crime and neighborhood where there are voucher holders.

Further, as the state faces exponential growth in the number of older adults in the state of Maryland, this law is important to seniors who are highly reliant on social security income. It is critical for seniors to have the opportunity to live independently in communities.

As this state grapples with adequate funding for schools and the needs for an aging population, the HOME Act will help to secure opportunity for the state's most vulnerable populations.

We urge you to vote favorably for HB 231.