



**TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE ENVIRONMENTAL AND TRANSPORTATION  
COMMITTEE**

**HB 231 HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES MADE EQUAL ACT**

**POSITION: SUPPORT**

**BY: LOIS HYBL AND RICHARD WILLSON, CO-PRESIDENTS**

**DATE: FEBRUARY 4, 2020**

The League of Women Voters of Maryland has actively supported legislation that prohibits property owners from discriminating against prospective renters based on their source of income for at least the last 15 years. We strongly support HB 231.

In prohibiting use of the source of a prospective renter's income as a selection criterion, this bill would open doors for many low and moderate-income renters that currently are denied a housing opportunity based solely on their source of income. Individuals and families having the lawful means to rent housing should not be denied that housing, based on where those means come from. The League believes such denial is discrimination and that the source of one's income should not be a determining factor in considering them as renters. Families who depend on alimony, disability income or rental subsidies are often told that those funds cannot be counted in calculating whether a family meets the required income to qualify to rent an available housing unit.

HB 231 does not prohibit a landlord from determining the ability of a potential renter to pay rent by verifying the source and amount of income of the renter, and evaluating the stability, security, and creditworthiness of the renter or their source of income. It is often difficult to find landlords who are willing to talk to families who are using rental vouchers. This refusal means that often, the only housing families receiving rental assistance can rent is in high poverty communities.

A report by the Urban Institute "Expanding Choice, practical strategies for building a successful housing mobility program", described follow-up results of a program that assisted low-income renters to use their rental assistance vouchers in low-poverty communities:

"MTO households that did manage to live for longer periods in neighborhoods with lower poverty did achieve better outcomes in work and school. Adults were more likely to have jobs and earn more, and youth had higher English and math test scores, other things being equal. These benefits were not only statistically significant but also meaningful in size. For example, an adult who lived in neighborhoods with poverty rates averaging 16 percent over a decade has a predicted monthly income \$233 higher at the end of the period than an adult who

lived in neighborhoods with poverty rates averaging 41 percent. The corresponding differences in boys predicted English and math test scores equate to nearly a year of instruction.”

The LWVMD, representing over 1,500 concerned citizens throughout Maryland, strongly urges the Committee to pass HB 231 out of committee.