

BRIAN E. FROSH
Attorney General

ELIZABETH F. HARRIS
Chief Deputy Attorney General

CAROLYN QUATTROCKI
Deputy Attorney General



WILLIAM D. GRUHN
Chief
Consumer Protection Division

STATE OF MARYLAND
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
CONSUMER PROTECTION DIVISION

February 4, 2019

Writer's Direct Dial No.
410-576-6986

To: The Honorable Kumar Barve
Chair, Environment and Transportation Committee

From: Kira Wilpone-Welborn
Staff Attorney

Re: House Bill 231 – Housing Opportunities Made Equal Act (SUPPORT)

The Consumer Protection Division of the Office of the Attorney General supports House Bill 231 sponsored by Delegates Lierman, McIntosh, Feldmark, Acevero, Bagnall, Boyce, Clippinger, Conaway, Cullinson, D.M. Davis, Fennell, Healey, Hettleman, Korman, Krimm, Lehman, R. Lewis, Love, Luedtke, McKay, Moon, Mosby, Palakovich Carr, Paterson, Reznik, Rosenberg, Shetty, Smith, Stewart, Terrasa, Valderrama, and Wells, which would update Maryland's fair housing laws and prohibit a person from refusing to rent or sell consumer realty to another because of their source of income. Moreover, as the City of Annapolis, Anne Arundel County, Baltimore City, Baltimore County, the City of Frederick, Frederick County, Howard County, Montgomery County, and Prince George's County have prohibitions on discrimination based on source of income, House Bill 231 would create a uniform policy of non-discrimination for all Marylanders.

Of particular importance, House Bill 231 would prohibit housing providers from refusing to lease consumer realty to persons only because of their use of rental assistance programs, such as vouchers issued pursuant to the United States Housing Act of 1937. Under the current law, landlords are permitted to refuse to rent or sell consumer realty on the sole basis of an individual's source of income. As a result, individuals relying on rental assistance or housing vouchers are unable to obtain the intended benefit of the governmental assistance, namely access to housing in the open market. Prohibiting discrimination based on one's source of income impairs the ability of Maryland consumers to access the full scope of available homes. Not only could House Bill 231 instill a uniform anti-discrimination policy in Maryland but could expand the market of consumer realty to more Marylanders while decreasing concentrations of poverty and increasing access to opportunity zones.

Accordingly, the Division requests that the Environment and Transportation Committee give House Bill 231 a favorable report.

200 Saint Paul Place ♦ Baltimore, Maryland 21202-2021

Main Office (410) 576-6300 ♦ Main Office Toll Free (888) 743-0023

Consumer Complaints and Inquiries (410) 528-8662 ♦ Health Advocacy Unit/Billing Complaints (410) 528-1840

Health Advocacy Unit Toll Free (877) 261-8807 ♦ Home Builders Division Toll Free (877) 259-4525 ♦ Telephone for Deaf (410) 576-6372

www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov

