



HOUSING COMMISSION OF ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY

7477 BALTIMORE-ANNAPOLIS BLVD.

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HB 231: The HOME Act – SUPPORT

**Testimony of Clifton C. Martin, CEO,
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**HOUSING COMMISSION OF ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY
House Environment and Transportation Committee, February 4, 2020**

Good Afternoon Members of the Committee:

My name is Clif Martin, and I am the CEO of the Housing Commission of Anne Arundel County, which administers the Housing Choice Voucher Program in our county.

For the past 27 years, I have provided affordable housing resources to many thousands of families in my county and have watched and observed them as they used our precious resource to secure an affordable, safe and comfortable place to live. 98% of these clients were elderly, disabled, veterans and working families who have lived, worked and had life experiences in our county. Some were in the military for years, retired librarians, retired school teachers, persons born with developmental disabilities and working moms with jobs at Walmart, the Department of Motor Vehicles and School Bus Drivers.

Last year, I received a call from a voucher recipient who worked in a hospital as a nurse. She was seeking to find a place for her family and became so desperate and despondent that she began reaching out to local elected officials about her plight. In her letter, she provided a list of over 55 owners and management companies who turned her away before she ever got to mention that she was a nurse at a local hospital. She could not understand how she could be cast out so easily. In her letter she stated that she was possibly going to be homeless, she could not afford full rent and still take care of her family. She just could not fathom how she could take care of the citizens of her county, but no one wanted to care for her.

These families have been blatantly discriminated against solely because they need help with a portion of their rent. They have doors closed in their faces, they get “hung up on” when calling landlords, are told “not interested”, and are stereotyped and stigmatized with monikers such as “criminals”, “moochers” and “lazy”. They are respected when they drive others children to school, or serve them lunch...they are acceptable when their assistance is needed to find an item at Walmart, and they are sought for help when they need to renew their driver’s license....

Just don’t live near me, rent from me or be part of my community.



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For way too many years this discussion at the State Level has been placed through the machine of Fantasy Island and Mythical Drivel to create a narrative that is embarrassingly fictional.

Let's put the myths on the table....

- 1) The program is extremely cumbersome. Truly, the program is no more challenging than obtaining your county or city dwelling licenses. Since the Fair Housing Bill passed in my county, I have personally heard from 3 new owners who offered that it was not as difficult as it was "hyped".
- 2) The inspections are so challenging. The program inspections are the most lenient of any city, county, state or federal protocol. Passing an inspection should be extremely easy. The pass rates for inspections are always over 90% in our county, and an owner gets multiple opportunities to pass. Now, owners can email the agencies repair photos and invoices to get a passing score.
- 3) There are huge delays in getting paid. This is absolutely inaccurate; most agencies pay their portion electronically the first days each month. Most agencies also now have software that allows owners to log in and get up to date payment information, payment ledgers and tax information.

Finally, I need to put this in some perspective that brings a reality to the discussion.

This is not a crazy, monumental shift of voucher holders taking over the state. The number of vouchers is fixed and rarely ever increases. They must get a fair chance like all other renters.

Since implementation of the new law in Anne Arundel County my office has received no complaints from owners or landlords and my peers in similar jurisdictions largely share the same results. It's clearly time to make this happen throughout the State.

Let's finally do the right thing, and stop the blatant discrimination against our elderly, disabled, veteran and working families.

Maryland is the wealthiest state in the Union, let's not be the most intolerant.