

Stephen Lafferty
909 Wellington Road
Baltimore, Maryland 21212
swlbwl@aol.com

Support for HB 231

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Vice Chair and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee.

My previous testimony before this committee was in person since I was honored to serve on this Committee for thirteen years. Now, as a former colleague who holds you and the House in the highest regard, let me strongly urge you to support HB 231, the Housing Opportunities Made Equal Act. I applaud Delegates Lierman and McIntosh and more than thirty co-sponsors for introducing this important legislation.

Housing discrimination, in any form, is totally unacceptable and should never be tolerated in Maryland. Maryland has wisely established state policies to foster, support and promote equality, fairness and opportunity in housing. It is time to ban another insidious form of housing discrimination – one that is based on the source of income of the tenant or purchaser. It is about justice, equality, providing opportunities and deconcentrating poverty.

Obviously, many jurisdictions recognize this, including Baltimore County that I represented. Add Baltimore City and Montgomery, Frederick, Howard, Prince Georges and Anne Arundel Counties, as well as the cities of Annapolis and Frederick to those communities that are striving for equality and opportunity for all of their residents.

Many on the Committee know this bill (the HOME Act) and protecting people against discrimination based on their source of income is very important to me. I first introduced a version of HB 231 in 2011. I introduced it seven, yes seven, times because the House needed to act and ban this form of discrimination. Resistance and misunderstanding did not deter me because it was, and is, the right thing to do. I was very proud that, after extensive negotiations, the House passed a version in 2017, only to see it fail in the Senate.

But that failure was probably a good omen because you now have the chance to pass a stronger bill that will guarantee that a landlord or property owner cannot reject the applicant based solely on one's source of income. We need to recognize that a Veteran's Voucher, a Housing Choice Voucher, Social Security and other sources of income are legitimate.

I hope that my work on similar legislation has set the stage for your thoughtful passage of HB 231. Do not be misled into thinking that exclusions, percentages or any other conditions are necessary. Enable every Maryland to have access to decent housing, strong communities, and good education. Do not limit access to housing based solely on the source of the payment. Voting for HB 231 is an important statement about Maryland's commitment to stopping housing discrimination in every form.

I ask for a favorable report on HB 231.

