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HB 231: The HOME Act – SUPPORT

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The Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership

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The Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership (BRHP) has operated the Baltimore Housing Mobility Program since 2013, providing more than 5,000 families with housing counseling and a Housing Choice Voucher, so that they may make the choice to move from some of the City's most impoverished neighborhoods. This life-changing move enables the family to access high-performing schools, better employment opportunities, and safer environments for raising children.

One of the greatest challenges facing the families we serve is discrimination based on source of income. Despite being entirely prepared to pay the full rent every month, they are often turned away when the landlord learns they are using a voucher. A recent HUD study determined that in some markets, voucher denial rates can be as high as 78 percent; and across the five markets studied, voucher denial rates were significantly higher in low-poverty neighborhoods.

The discrimination against voucher-assisted families has led to areas of Maryland being virtually off-limits. This exacerbates the problems of unequal opportunity for housing choice and geographic concentration of poverty resulting from decades of harmful federal, state, and local policies. While 50 percent of rental units in the state are concentrated in 302 of its 1,406 census tracts, 50 percent of voucher-assisted rental units are further concentrated in only 183 tracts. For many jurisdictions across the state, voucher holder families are concentrated in neighborhoods with an average poverty rate exceeding 20 percent, more than twice the state's average.

Frederick County passed legislation protecting families from source of income discrimination in 2009. Six other jurisdictions have recently followed suit. 81 percent of voucher-assisted households are now protected by existing local fair housing law that bans discrimination based on source of income. HB 231 will ensure equal protections across the state, covering the nearly 10,000 voucher-assisted families that remain subject to discrimination.

We support the adoption of HB 231 without amendments.