



**Senate Bill 117 (Senator Sydnor)
Workgroup on Minority Homeownership, Neighborhood Revitalization,
and Household Wealth Equity
FAVORABLE**

February 9, 2021

Dear Chairman Pinsky and Members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee:

On behalf of Strong Future Maryland, we write in strong support of Senate Bill 117. Strong Future Maryland works to advance bold, progressive policy changes to address systemic inequality and promote a sustainable, just and prosperous economic future for all Marylanders. We implore you to support this legislation as a part of the effort to not only respond to this public health and economic crisis, but move the needle more broadly to enact progressive, equitable housing policies favored by the people of Maryland.

The intensity of housing insecurity felt around Maryland, and the entire country, has dramatically increased as households weather the financial strain imposed by pandemic-related unemployment, skyrocketing healthcare bills, and an ever-fluctuating market. In 2020, the [National Low Income Housing Coalition](#) concluded that working at Maryland's \$11/hour minimum wage, individuals would have to work 85-hour weeks "to afford a modest 1 bedroom rental home at Fair Market Rent." Essential workers especially the [36%](#) of whom identify as Black or Hispanic and the majority of whom depend on minimum wage, need to be prioritized in any and all conversations centering around homeownership efforts and wealth equity creation.

Residential pockets within the state that have been disproportionately affected by racist [redlining policies, discriminatory lending](#), and generational disinvestment must also be prioritized in the General Assembly's endeavors to build wealth through housing and neighborhood revitalization. A [2016 Abell Foundation Report](#) on housing affordability in Baltimore City, for example, cites overwhelming rent prices, often amounting to over 50% of household income, as a barrier to wealth creation within more vulnerable communities. The differing homeownership rates between Maryland jurisdictions only underscore how far we need to go to promote wealth building in underserved areas; [Howard County's 2019 homeownership rate](#) of 76.38264% is far greater than those of [Prince George's County](#) (63.22582%) or [Baltimore City](#) (49.96455%).

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Besides building generational and community wealth, increasing homeownership rates amongst minority populations restores a sense of investment, dignity, and pride in struggling neighborhoods, [prompting spikes in community organization, attracting businesses, and fostering a sense of shared responsibility for neighborhood safety and upkeep](#). Countless studies have also shown that higher homeownership rates are correlated with lower crime rates and better educational outcomes as well. A [2018 report from the Office of Higher Education](#) noted higher ACT scores, graduation rates, and college enrollment rates for students who did not experience housing insecurity compared to their counterparts who did.

As we strive to heal equitably from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and account for discriminatory housing policies of the past, a dedicated workgroup committed to advancing Minority Homeownership, Neighborhood Revitalization, and Household Wealth Equity is critical. For all of these reasons, we urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 117.

John B. King Jr.
Founder and Board Chair

Alice Wilkerson
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