



January 27, 2023

The Honorable Kumar P. Barve
Chairman, Environment and Transportation Committee
House Office Building,
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Testimony in Support of House Bill 60

Dear Chairperson Barve and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 60, legislation that would create housing to break down the stratification between those renters with different incomes, and requiring any housing built to have affordability restrictions of 99 years. This letter serves as notice that Gregory Countess will be testifying on behalf of Maryland Legal Aid (MLA), at the request of Delegate Vaughn Stewart.

MLA is a non-profit law firm that provides free legal services to the State's low-income and vulnerable residents. MLA handles civil legal cases involving a wide range of issues, including representing people and families struggling with housing and eviction.

The human right to housing is one of the most essential and universally recognized human rights. It finds strong recognition in international, federal, and state. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees "the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of [the individual] and of his[her] family, including food, clothing, shelter and medical care and necessary social services."¹ One of the basic aspects of the right to housing is that such housing should be affordable.²

By any measure, housing is not affordable for thousands of residents throughout Maryland. The Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development commissioned a study released in December of 2020 that measured housing need in this state. The report noted that, "Despite continued progress, ... Maryland currently lacks approximately 85,000 rental units for its lowest income households (meaning extremely low-income or those earning 30 percent of area median income [AMI (Area Median Income)] or below). In many parts of the state, there aren't enough rental units for very low-income households (those earning under 50 percent AMI) either. Maryland will add an estimated 97,200 extremely and very low-income households between 2020 and 2030. Without further acceleration to create and preserve deeply affordable units, this shortage will worsen."³

¹ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, G.A. Res. 217, U.N. GAOR, 3d Sess., pt. 1, U.N. Doc. A/810 (1948).

² General Comment 4, Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, U.N. Doc. E/1992/23, ¶6 (1991).

³ <https://dhcd.maryland.gov/Documents/Other%20Publications/Report.pdf>

HB 60 is an important affirmative step in increasing the supply of affordable housing to Maryland renters, particularly if the bill grants maximum flexibility to Housing Authorities to establish a one-for-one match of Housing Authority funds to program funds.

By providing opportunity for Housing Authorities to reduce economic stratification by not mandating that the housing serve only those with incomes below 60 percent of AMI, while also requiring that any housing built using the fund have affordability restrictions of 99 years the bill provides an incentive to build communities of opportunity while also building housing that is permanently affordable.

For these reasons we urge a favorable report for HB 60.

Sincerely,

/GC/

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