



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony in Support of HB 79**

**The Whole-Home Repairs Act of 2023**

Testimony by Delegate Vaughn Stewart

January 31st, 2023 | Environment & Transportation Committee

**What the Bill Does**

**House Bill 79 would establish the Whole Homes-Repair Program under the Department of Housing and Community Development.** The program would provide local administering agencies with funding to pass on to homeowners and small landlords for property repairs. The program could also improve coordination across the state's home repair programs, and increase retention in workforce development programs.

If enacted, the program would provide grants of up to \$50,000 to be used for repairs related to health, efficiency, and accessibility. Two-thirds of the funding would be reserved for property owners with a household income under 50% of the area's median income.

The funds would also allow those agencies to launch workforce development programs. The workforce development program would provide cash stipends to trainees and assist with costs related to the design and implementation of pre-apprenticeship, apprenticeship, and publicly funded on-the-job training. The goal is to create jobs in partnership with local businesses committed to improving the habitability and performance of residential properties.

The creation of a statewide whole-home repair program, filling in the gaps left by existing programs, would fight the housing crisis, the climate crisis, and the displacement of communities all at once. By protecting low-income homeowners, as well as small landlords and their tenants, Maryland can preserve and restore the places homeowners and renters already call home.

**Why the Bill is Important**

The Whole-Home Repairs Act seeks to address habitability issues and acknowledges the threat of loss of homeownership due to repair costs. Current demand for home repairs and weatherization far outpaces available funding, and lack of coordination among existing programs means that many eligible households don't receive any funding at all. When Marylanders forgo expensive repairs, many are forced to sell their homes, which worsens displacement and destabilizes communities. Our residents

are falling through the cracks in our current system, and our communities, and our affordable housing stock, are suffering because of it.

Over time, even minor home issues deteriorate into health and safety hazards. Landlords who maintain properties face the challenges of aging infrastructure and poor property conditions. Homeowners are often forced into a terrible choice when budgeting: put aside their money for home repairs, or spend it on family necessities such as health care and food? Without repairs, units may be removed from the housing stock, further exacerbating the shortage of affordable and available units. Much-needed investments would provide higher-quality living conditions to Maryland homeowners and renters and would preserve affordability in the long term.

The success of local home repair interventions hinges upon the availability of skilled workers employed by licensed and insured businesses, but there are not enough skilled home repair professionals to meet an increased demand. Through the creation of the Whole Home Repairs Program, service providers will have access to flexible funding that will increase retention in construction, roofing, HVAC, and weatherization training and certification programs by providing wraparound supports—stipends for essential needs like transportation, childcare, and food or other pre-employment supportive services—to trainees.

### **Why the Committee Should Vote Favorably**

Maryland can be a leader in preserving affordable housing and training a local workforce to meet the growing demand. The Whole-Home Repairs Act fills in the gaps in our current system by taking a three-pronged approach:

1. It funds habitability repairs and energy efficiency updates for homes throughout Maryland by providing grants to homeowners and forgivable loans to small landlords with affordability restrictions.
2. It allocates resources for support staff to help people access the right programs in the right order to meet their needs and maximize their access to holistic repairs.
3. It boosts retention in home repair and weatherization training programs and pre-apprenticeship programs, including by providing stipends to trainees, so that our state can build up the skilled workforce it needs.

By passing the Whole-Home Repairs Act, Maryland will help keep residents safely housed, stabilize communities, lower utility bills, reduce energy use, prevent blight, and create new, good-paying jobs in a growing industry. **I urge a favorable report.**