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February 16, 2023

Delegate Kumar P. Barve, Chair
Delegate Dana M. Stein, Vice Chair
Room 251
House Office Building, 6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Support for House Bill 460 – Department of Housing and Community Development – Racial Equity Impact Assessment
Hearing before the House Environment and Transportation Committee on February 21, 2023

Position: Support (FAV)

Dear Honorable Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf the Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership (BRHP). I am writing to express our support for HB 460. This legislation will require the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development to prepare Racial Equity Impact Assessments annually for public consumption. These analyses will help ensure that the Department is focusing the scarce financial resources to communities with the largest need and with the largest population of economically marginalized populations.

The Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership (BRHP) is a non-profit organization that expands housing choices for families with low incomes, who have historically been excluded from housing in well-resourced neighborhoods, helping them to access and transition successfully to safe, healthy, and economically vibrant communities. As the Regional Administrator for the Baltimore Housing Mobility Program, BRHP has opened pathways to a better future for low-income families for nearly 10 years.

BRHP currently provides over 4,300 low-income families rental assistance in the form of the Housing Choice Voucher and couples that with counseling supports for families as they move from areas of concentrated poverty to areas of opportunity in Baltimore City and the five surrounding counties. BRHP is dedicated to helping achieve racially and socially equitable public policy that ensures low-income families have access to quality and affordable homes in communities of their choice. We support HB 460 because we have seen year-over-year that precious financial resources administered by the Department be allocated in a manner disproportionate to the need across the state.

Background

The 2020 Maryland Housing Needs Assessment produced by the department reveals that nearly 70 percent of renter households reside in the Baltimore Metropolitan area and the suburban counties of Washington, DC. Nearly half of those renter households experience cost-burdens beyond the acceptable level. These markets also contain 84 percent of the State's Extremely Low-Income (ELI) households, a disproportionate number of whom are minority. It is essential that the

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Department does an annual analysis of the efficacy with which it is addressing the needs of these households and that resources are provided proportionate to the need, so that it may shift policies to better align the resources with the need.

Quality of life, well-being and health are products of the environments in which individuals and families live, play, work, and age. In fact, as much as 80% of a person's health can be attributed to factors outside of clinical care. Housing stability, quality, safety, and affordability all affect health outcomes, as do physical and social characteristics of neighborhoods. With housing being one of the most researched social determinants of health, a vast library of literature determines a direct link between housing assistance and improvements in family stability, economic growth, education retention, and health outcomes. It is imperative that the Department of Housing and Community Development approach housing policies, plans, and spending holistically and equitably so that underserved communities do not continue to bear multi-generational consequences of racially and socially discriminatory housing practices. This legislation will provide Maryland with an accountability tool and uphold housing as the foundation of public health and the key to closing the ever-widening equity gap across all sectors.

Equity Implications

Housing policies must be employed as a tool to combat the persistence of income inequality, racial segregation, environmental inequalities, and poverty concentration as populations grow and neighborhoods shift. Maryland has a long history of racist and discriminatory housing practices, from zoning and development planning that effectively discriminated against racial minorities and lower income families, to allowing restrictive covenants, mortgage redlining, and blockbusting that has trapped generations of Black and Brown families in impoverished, underserved neighborhoods. A just society in Maryland can only be assured when everyone regardless of age, race, religion, socio-economic background, gender identity, location, or disability, can share fairly in a prosperous and inclusive economy without race-based or other structural barriers that impede them.

BRHP appreciates your consideration and urges the Committee to issue a favorable report for HB460.

Sincerely,

Adria Crutchfield
Executive Director
Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership

