



February 27, 2023

The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr., Chair
and Members, Judicial Proceedings Committee
Maryland Senate
Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

My name is Dan Reed and I serve as the Regional Policy Director for [Greater Greater Washington](#), a nonprofit that works to advance racial, economic, and environmental justice in land use, transportation, and housing throughout the DC area, including the state of Maryland. We support Senate Bill 819 as a crucial first step to expanding tenant protections.


About one-third of Maryland households rent, according to the Census Bureau, and the right of first refusal gives them more control over their housing situation and a greater sense of security. In much of the state, when a landlord decides to sell a property, tenants may worry about potential rent hikes, having to move, or even eviction. This is an especially big deal right now, as rents in the Washington, DC area increased by double digits between 2021 and 2022.¹ For many renters, a change in ownership could mean losing their home – and potentially access to jobs, education, healthcare, friends, and loved ones.

This bill will create a Right of First Refusal (ROFR) fund that aids nonprofits in covering the costs of acquiring, renovating, and maintaining rental properties as affordable housing, which is an opportunity to improve tenants' housing stability. It could be helpful in situations like a Takoma Park apartment building covered in our online publication, where the tenants bought their building, renovated it, and converted it to a limited equity cooperative where the tenants would now own a share of the building.² This can be a transformative opportunity for renters, allowing them to stay in a community where they have roots – or to remain in a community so they can put down roots. We applaud the bill's focus on the areas of the state with the greatest lack of affordable homes, so that it may have the greatest impact.

In the future, we hope Maryland will have a statewide ROFR law, as requirements vary in the jurisdictions that currently have them. In Prince George's County the law only applies to buildings with more than 20 units, in Montgomery County, it covers buildings with at least four units, in Baltimore City,

¹ <https://dcist.com/story/22/07/18/dc-md-va-rent-increases-covid-deals/>

² <https://ggwash.org/view/86488/as-housing-prices-soar-takoma-park-tenants-seek-new-solutions>

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the law covers single-family homes. We note that in the District of Columbia, home to the oldest right of first refusal law in the nation, the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA) applies to buildings with at least two units, and before 2018, also included single units.³ A statewide ROFR law will give more Maryland renters access to an important protection from displacement, and having a uniform standard will make it easier for tenants to understand and take advantage of their rights.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments. I am happy to discuss any questions or concerns you have by phone at **202/256-7238** or by email at **dreed@ggwash.org**, and we look forward to working with you to achieve our state's housing goals.

Sincerely,

Dan Reed
Regional Policy Director
Greater Greater Washington

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https://www.washingtonpost.com/realestate/dc-council-seeks-to-abolish-tenants-right-of-first-refusal-to-buy-their-landlords-single-family-homes/2018/05/01/80ba1e12-4a3d-11e8-9072-f6d4bc32f223_story.html