



HB 243

Ways and Means Committee

Date: Tuesday, March 26, 2024

Time: 12:00 PM

Position: OPPOSE

The SOS Fund, an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, addresses the systemic housing instability experienced by historically red-lined communities in Baltimore City. This instability has resulted in generations of residents losing their homes, thus denying them the wealth-building capacity of homeownership. **The SOS Fund opposes HB 243 because re-introducing water bills into tax sale places homeowners with tangled titles and misclassified properties at increased risk of losing their homes to tax sale. Additionally, it increases the risk of eviction for renters as their landlord's properties are at a higher likelihood of tax sale foreclosure.**

HB 243 sets out to limit the provision on water bills to say that the collector (Baltimore City Department of Finance) shall withhold owner-occupied residential property from tax sale for water bills alone, along with removing the \$250 dollar threshold. Both of these actions spring from the same false premise - that tax sale is an appropriate tool for community development.

In effect, this proposal will negate the hard fought advocacy undertaken by legislators and advocates who removed water bills from the tax sale because they understand the rampant inaccuracies seen with water billing, and the fact that many homeowners are living in homes that are incorrectly classified as non-owner occupied properties because the title is in this name of a parent or grandparent. This misclassification would mean that they would be included in the tax sale if their water bills become delinquent. We cannot, in good conscience, support a bill that endangers these residents.

Furthermore this bill removes the provision requiring municipalities to create payment plans. This is a step in the wrong direction, as we believe it to be of the utmost importance that city government develop actionable payment plans so that they might work with vulnerable homeowners to get their bills paid in a timely manner and in addition, place residential properties in payment plans so that the revenue from the delinquency interest be captured by the city.

For the above reasons,

The SOS Fund urges a UNFAVORABLE report.

Please contact Nneka Nnamdi, Executive Director, with any questions nneka@thesosfund.com

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