

## Testimony in Favor of SB0356.

My name is Alexandra Bell. I live in Rockville, Maryland and I am a member of Bethesda Friends Meeting (Quaker), which is a member congregation of Action in Montgomery. Together with People Acting Together in Howard and Anna Arundel Connecting Together, we are more than 65 congregations, schools and community organizations representing tens of thousands of residents. We have helped win thousands of units of affordable housing in our counties over the past 20 years, including \$1.5 billion in funding for affordable housing. About 50 years ago, Bethesda Friends Meeting helped create an affordable housing community in Silver Spring, Friendly Gardens, which is still going strong and where families are thriving.

Maryland is in a housing crisis. There is a shortage of over 96,000 homes, and prices of renting or owning homes have been increasing significantly. Affordable housing is the number one issue we hear in our listening sessions when we ask people what is the biggest issue that gets in the way of them or their families thriving.

One of the biggest challenges to building more affordable housing, and more housing generally, is access to land that can be developed. We are grateful that Senator Muse is taking the lead in sponsoring Senate Bill 356 to make it easier and more cost-efficient for affordable housing to be built on congregational land. Many of our congregations have land but are struggling to make ends meet financially. Building affordable housing on their property can help alleviate the housing crisis and help make the congregations more financially solvent into the future. One of the biggest barriers to congregations building affordable housing is the often long and cumbersome development process, and Senate Bill 356 would go a long way to making it easier and less expensive for congregations to build affordable housing to benefit their communities. Additionally, many congregations are close to public transportation, which is particularly important for affordable housing, and has been shown to be the most effective way for people to move out of poverty.

We hope that you will join other jurisdictions in the DMV and across the country in supporting more opportunities to have affordable housing on congregational land. Thank you!