



House Bill 501

Charter Counties – Enforcement of Local Laws

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Environment and Transportation
Committee

Date: February 13, 2024

From: Sarah Sample and Brianna January

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 501. This bill increases the maximum fine that a charter county, through its “home rule” authority, may levy for a violation of a local ordinance. Additionally, it applies to charter county enforcement of the Fair Housing Act of 1988 and any local employment or public accommodation discrimination laws.

Ensuring compliance with local laws has a direct connection to quality-of-life standards that communities need to thrive. These violations can affect the look, smell, and feel of a community and even how community members interact with and support each other. When individuals and businesses create a habit of intentionally violating accepted standards that are required by law, those indiscretions erode the fabric that distinguishes a simple neighborhood from a true community of people.

Fines for community violations are at their best when they deter the root problems but avoid unfair application. Unfortunately, the original fine of \$1,000 for these types of violations has not kept pace with other market variables and inflation, and therefore, has become somewhat of a simple “cost of doing business” for entities in regular, even calculated, violation of these laws. A fine of \$5,000 for these violations is consistent with a penalty that will effectively, and appropriately, change behaviors. This will help restore the trust, protection, and assurance residents need to live, work, and thrive in any jurisdiction.

MACo appreciates the General Assembly’s understanding, concern, and willingness to address this matter. HB 501 is a reasonable step to do so and for these reasons, MACo **SUPPORTS** HB 501 and urges a **FAVORABLE** report.