



Chair Marc Korman  
and Members, Environment and Transportation Committee  
House Office Building  
6 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

February 20, 2024

Dear Chair Korman and Members of the Environment and Transportation 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 Greater Washington. **GGWash strongly supports House Bill 424.**

This legislation will remove a significant barrier to producing much-needed affordable homes by repealing the provision, applying only to public housing development, requiring additional public hearings beyond the development review process. It is a 1950s law rooted in segregation that uses the public process as a tool to keep people out, and communities around the country enacted similar laws—including California, which [amended their state constitution](#) to put all public housing projects in the state to a referendum. Attached you'll find a few examples of how community members have applied this law to stop Montgomery County Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC) projects.


When the state empowers people to block housing in their neighborhoods, we all pay a cost. We have a local and statewide housing shortage, and HOC is an important tool for producing affordable housing at scale and increasing the supply of market-rate, attainable housing. HOC projects already go through an extensive development review process like any other housing development, including a public hearing.

We ask the Environment and Transportation Committee to give this bill a favorable review. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Dan Reed'.

Dan Reed  
Regional Policy Director  
Greater Greater Washington

The Washington, DC region is great  and it can be greater.



## Selected historical examples of citizen opposition to HOC projects

- In 1980, Silver Spring and Wheaton residents packed a public hearing for a proposed 72 townhouse HOC development behind Northwood High School on University Boulevard, describing it as “an economic ghetto.” That same year, 400 Potomac residents came to a public hearing to fight an HOC proposal there. Neither of those projects were built.<sup>1</sup>
- In 1982, the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development withheld federal money for two HOC projects in Germantown and Colesville due to neighbor complaints, holding up a combined 87 homes.<sup>2</sup>
- In the 1980s, Olney residents fought the Towne Centre Place development, complaining that “low-income families would bring crime and vandalism, which in turn would lower property values.”<sup>3</sup>
- At a 1993 hearing, one Bethesda resident who opposed the now-built Metropolitan apartment building compared it to “taking a few starving people and putting them in the Trump Tower” and implied it was part of a conspiracy to give county employees luxury apartments.<sup>4</sup>
- In 1994, DC residents fought a proposed HOC development just across the line in Silver Spring, complaining Montgomery County “seems determined to dump even more people it doesn’t want” near them<sup>5</sup> and turning their neighborhood “into a ghetto.”<sup>6</sup>
- In the 1990s, Potomac residents again fought a proposal for 54 HOC townhomes, claiming it would “encroach on the exclusive way of life they moved there for.”<sup>7</sup>
- In 1997, Bethesda residents tried to block HOC from buying an existing apartment building, complaining it would overcrowd local schools and calling it “a sea change for a very established area.”<sup>8</sup>
- In 2006, Silver Spring residents opposed HOC placing eight unhoused people in a vacant apartment building, claiming it would endanger students at an adjacent elementary and middle school.<sup>9</sup>
- In 2008, Bethesda residents fought HOC’s proposal to place a homeless family in a county-owned house, with some referring to the potential residents as a “welfare brood sow and her 13 kids.” The home was ultimately demolished.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Wheaton, Silver Spring Residents Fight Subsidized-Housing Plan.” Vivian Rigdon, *The Washington Post*, 24 Jan 1980: MD3.

<sup>2</sup> “Complaints Stall Housing Project.” Elsa L. Walsh, *The Washington Post*, 04 Feb 1982: MD3.

<sup>3</sup> “Where We Live: Towne Centre: Public Housing A Cut Above Montgomery’s Low-Impact, High-Success Development.” Paul Valentine, *The Washington Post*, 20 Nov 1993: E1

<sup>4</sup> “In Bethesda, Low-Income Housing With All the Extras: Posh Downtown Complex Would Accommodate Mix of Top-Dollar and Subsidized Renters.” Joyce Murdoch, *The Washington Post*, 05 Apr 1993: B1.

<sup>5</sup> “Borderline Dumping Ground.” Belva Newsome and Dean Burrell, *The Washington Post*, 10 Apr 1994: C8.

<sup>6</sup> “Housing Plan’s Revival Riles Silver Spring, D.C. Neighbors: Montgomery Asks Metro to Remove Legal Obstacle.” Brian Moar, *The Washington Post*, 10 May 1994: D8.

<sup>7</sup> “Potomac Site Chosen for Housing Plan.” Louis, Aguilar, *The Washington Post*, 31 Mar 1994: B3.

<sup>8</sup> “Deal to Convert High-Rise Passes.” Lisa Fine, *The Washington Post*, 16 Jan 1997: MD1B

<sup>9</sup> “Neighbors Unsettled by Bid To Put Homeless Near Schools.” Trejos, Nancy. *The Washington Post*, 10 Apr 2006: B2.

<sup>10</sup> “From Stately Beginnings, a Not-So-Eloquent Turn as Residents Protest Using House for Homeless.” Fisher, Marc. *The Washington Post*, 8 Jun 2008. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/06/07/AR2008060701804.html>