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Judiciary Committee

Subcommittees

Chair, Family and Juvenile Law

Public Safety



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

April 1, 2025

The Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
The Honorable Brian Feldman, Chair
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

**Re: HB 964 Montgomery County-Task Force on the Displacement of Residents of Emory Grove
MC 5-25**

Dear Chairman Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan and Committee:

This legislation is necessary to understand the urban renewal policies and procedures pursued by Montgomery County, Maryland from late 1960 until 1985 that affected a historically African American community, Emory Grove, within Montgomery County.

Emory Grove was founded shortly after the civil war, when several freedmen from local farms purchased property which was considered rocky and unusable for farming. The community was a self-contained community anchored by the Emory Grove United Methodist Church, a business district and a recreation park with the only lighted baseball field in Montgomery County (Johnson's Park). The community thrived for over 100 years.

The passage of the Housing Act of 1949 spurred the start of rehabilitation projects in urban and suburban communities nationwide. Even though the Act was aimed to clear areas of "blight" or "slums" to make way for modern development. Unfortunately, it disproportionately targeted African American communities and lead to permanent displacement and harm to African American families.

Efforts around the use of urban renewal were sparked in the 1960's after the Montgomery County Council passed an ordinance requiring all homes to have piped in water and sewage lines.

At the time, most living conditions in Emory Grove were substandard with:

- Few homes had running water.

- Almost no homes had sewer facilities
- Some residents lived in crowded shacks without electricity.
- Roads were poorly constructed.

Blaming the living conditions and the costs associated to build water and sewer facilities, both Montgomery County and the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission refused to intervene to construct the water and sewer facilities within the community. The cost was estimated to be over \$ 1 million.

As a result, Montgomery County designated Emory Grove as the first area in the county to be developed under the urban rehabilitation program (Emory Grove Urban Renewal Project).

Expectations for the urban renewal project were as follows:

- Financing available to enable all landowners to continue living in their homes with the promise that no one would have to move until a replacement home was completed.
- 300 new single-family homes (detached) and 325 townhomes available for rent and sale. (Time schedule-May 1969 under construction, 1970 estimated completion).

The Emory Grove Urban Renewal Project ran eight (8) years behind schedule, with the first phase completed in 1978. Condemnation actions on homes in Emory Grove were completed by the late 1970's. By 1983, only 17 of the original 126 families remained.

This is an unfortunate story about a community where promises were made and broken.

For the reasons stated above, I respectfully request a favorable report for HB 964.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charlotte Crutchfield". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Charlotte" and last name "Crutchfield" clearly legible.

Delegate Charlotte Crutchfield