



POSITION STATEMENT

Bill: SB 0436/HB 489 Maryland Department of Labor - Study on Building Code Requirements for Single-Staircase Buildings

Position: Support

Date: March 25, 2025

Contact: Debra Borden, General Counsel

Jordan Baucum Colbert, Government Affairs Liaison

Dear: Chair Brian Feldman,

The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (“M-NCPPC” or the “Commission”) has taken voted to support this bill. Staff have prepared comments.

What this Bill Does. This bill requires the Maryland Department of Labor to study and make recommendations regarding building code requirements for single-staircase buildings.

With continually increasing construction costs and the housing shortage across the country, and especially in Maryland, it is critical that we explore options to lower constructions costs and provide more units. Requirements for two stairways were initially established in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as a response to tenement reform movements and urban conflagrations. However, a recent study of single-stair buildings in New York City, where single-stair buildings have been allowed for decades, found no difference in fire death rates between single- and double-stair buildings. With improved building science and additions to building codes, such as sprinkler requirements and other safety measures, over the past 100+ years, it is time to revisit the building code to see if single-stair design is a viable option.

Double-stair buildings are more costly to build and require larger footprints. Pew Trust research shows that single-stair buildings can lower construction costs by 6 to 13 percent. Single-stair construction also allows for building on smaller, narrower lots and could lead to more units and/or larger units within a building. Single-stair designs may also advance planning priorities, such as: environmental sustainability and resilience through improved building efficiency; transit-oriented development on small sites in areas near Metro stations and existing infrastructure; and economic competitiveness with expanded housing options.

Several states, including Virginia, have passed similar legislation to study this issue or enabling legislation to allow local jurisdictions to revise building codes for single-stair design. We look forward to this study and the opportunity to better understand the applicability of this building type in Maryland.

Therefore, the Commission requests a favorable report on SB 0436.