

Historic Takoma, Inc.

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historictakoma.org

February 6, 2025

TESTIMONY OF HISTORIC TAKOMA, INC. IN SUPPORT OF SB 513 Jennifer Martin, President

Senator Smith and Members of the Judicial Proceeding Committee:

Historic Takoma strongly supports the enactment of SB513 as a means to efficiently remove unlawful racial covenants on properties in the State of Maryland.

Historic Takoma, Inc. is a non-profit, all-volunteer organization incorporated in the State of Maryland in 1979 for the purpose of protecting, preserving, and sharing the history and culture of Takoma Park. Our organization has championed the removal of unlawful racial covenants, conducting relevant research, educating the community through workshops and talks, and helping residents remove such language from their deeds.

Our [Covenants Project](https://historictakoma.org/covenant/) (historictakoma.org/covenant/) documents the background and history of racial covenants and includes a database of all known racial covenants in Takoma Park with the location and text of those covenants. We developed a [guide for property owners](#) to use to request removal of unlawful racial covenants, have conducted a number of workshops on the removal process, and have worked with individual property owners to assist them with the removal process. Although the actual process is a simple one, it can be daunting to many property owners. With an estimated 1,100 or more covenants on properties in Takoma Park removal of them one by one is a tedious and lengthy endeavor.

As part of our work to both publicize the existence of these unlawful racial covenants and seek a more efficient means of removing them, we contacted the City of Takoma Park about utilizing the authority under current law for municipalities and counties to request removal of unlawful racial covenants.

Unfortunately the statute requires that, prior to requesting removal of the covenants, the city must notify anyone with an “ownership interest” in an affected property by first class mail. This imposes an enormous administrative and fiscal burden on the city. To provide such notice the city would need to identify all those with “ownership interest” (a vague and undefined term) and their mailing addresses. With over 1,100 properties affected in Takoma Park this could require hundreds of hours of city staff time and the preparation of several thousand letters. Throughout the state, other municipalities wishing to pursue removal of unlawful racial covenants face the same obstacles. The current statute is well intentioned but is practically unworkable.

The proposed legislation, SB513, addresses the practicality issues by providing the municipality with three additional notice options via posting notices in newspapers, at the courthouse, and on the city website. Combined with many outreach/communication tools (such the city newsletter and social media along with Historic Takoma’s website, newsletter, and social media) these options will provide an efficient means of notice to those with “ownership interest.” The public will be afforded notice and the city will be spared the extreme administrative and fiscal burden of the current notice requirement. This is a win-win situation for property owners, the City of Takoma Park, and other municipalities in the State of Maryland, all of whom have an interest in removing these unlawful covenants.

Once enacted, Historic Takoma stands ready to assist the city with the notification process and submission of the necessary documentation for removal of the unlawful covenants. Your support and approval of the legislation will make accomplishing this public policy goal a reality and will further the cause of social justice in our communities.

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