



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

TESTIMONY

**SB 866: Common Ownership Communities - Ombudsman Unit, Governing Document  
Database, and Local Commissions**

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, Vice Chair, and members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee.

Senate Bill 866 would establish an Ombudsman Unit for the citizens of Maryland. This bill is designed to provide a dedicated resource for individuals with questions related to their common ownership communities (COCs), as there is currently **no** state agency available to assist them. The Ombudsman Unit would serve as a **point of contact** for residents seeking guidance on COC-related issues, offering an alternative to costly legal disputes and litigation.

The Common Ownership Community Ombudsman Unit would be responsible for monitoring changes in relevant laws, publishing information about COCs on the Office of the Attorney General's (OAG) website, assisting members in understanding their rights, and providing referrals to alternative dispute resolution services when requested. Additionally, the unit would receive and respond to complaints from members regarding final adverse decisions made by a governing body or COC manager. It would then refer the complaint to the appropriate local commission for further review to determine whether the final adverse decision conflicts with laws or regulations governing COCs in the jurisdiction, or make that determination itself and promptly notify the complainant.

Currently, as many of you know, if a resident has a question related to their common ownership community, there is no dedicated organization to provide answers. While the Attorney General's Office offers mediation services, those efforts are not always successful. Furthermore, the AG's Office cannot provide legal advice to callers seeking guidance on COC-related matters.

However, a couple jurisdictions in Maryland have established Commissions on Common Ownership Communities (CCOCs), specifically in Prince George's County and Montgomery County. These commissions, however, do not operate in the same manner. Montgomery County's CCOC, which Delegate Holmes, the House sponsor has modeled certain legislative efforts after, allows residents to attend monthly meetings and ask questions, but it too is unable to offer legal advice.

The Ombudsman Unit established under this Act would serve as an important resource to handle the complaints made by our constituents.

In closing, this bill is not a mandate; it simply establishes the office. Therefore, I respectfully urge a **FAVORABLE** committee report for SB 866.