

SENATOR SARAH ELFRETH  
*Legislative District 30*  
Anne Arundel County

Budget and Taxation Committee

*Subcommittees*

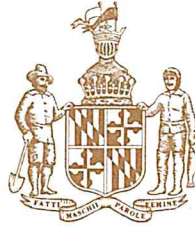
Education, Business and Administration

Chair, Pensions

*Senate Chair*

Joint Committee on Administrative,  
Executive, and Legislative Review

Joint Committee on the Chesapeake and  
Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area



James Senate Office Building  
11 Bladen Street, Room 103  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
410-841-3578 · 301-858-3578  
800-492-7122 Ext. 3578  
Fax 410-841-3156 · 301-858-3156  
Sarah.Elfreth@senate.state.md.us

## THE SENATE OF MARYLAND

ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 5, 2020

### Testimony in Favor of SB0288

#### City of Annapolis - Housing Authority - Prohibitions Against Exceptions to Local Laws

Chairman Pinsky, Vice-Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee,

I respectfully request a favorable report of Senate Bill 288. This bill prohibits the City of Annapolis from exempting the Housing Authority of the City of Annapolis (HACA) from local laws related to the inspection of property or licensure of property - thereby closing the loophole that has allowed 790 housing units of public housing in my community to be sporadically inspected and held to lower health and safety standards than private housing.

While decades of under-investment in HACA properties is not news, new litigation between the City, HACA, and residents of HACA was filed over the summer that put a bright spotlight on the deplorable living conditions our neighbors are forced to live in. In a letter to my office, the residents described living conditions that led to “emotionally exhausted and physically ill as a result of just trying to get from day to day...many report frequent inability to sleep, and many also report that they literally cry every time they think about their living conditions and what it is taking just to get someone to pay attention to their situation.” These inhabitable living conditions include excessive mold, sewage leaks, and air ducts crusted with years of dust and debris resulting in decades of under-investment and lesser living standards. I’ve visited these neighbors, I’ve sat in their living rooms and seen first hand the results of decades of neglect in neighborhoods mere blocks from the State House.

In a motion to dismiss this litigation, attorneys for the City cite the power granted to them under Housing and Community Development §12-506(b)(9) which grants a State public body the ability “make exceptions to it to its sanitary, building, housing, fire, health, subdivision, or other similar laws, rules, regulations, and ordinances” to not require these units to be inspected while private rental units are inspected on a yearly basis.

While this litigation is still pending, we must act now to try and restore my community's faith in government. This bill would address the loophole by prohibiting the City from granting exceptions to HACA from laws related to licensure or inspections of property - therefore requiring our public housing to be held to the same standard as our private housing.

This bill is just one small step in a long-term plan to completely rehabilitate and revitalize these communities in my district. In August, I penned an op-ed with my House colleagues from 30A (submitted as testimony) that outlined this plan developed in coordination with City and County officials to address the underlying problems in these communities; including, completely inspecting each and every unit, creating a list, reviewing, and address all deferred maintenance, and, ensuring that we maximize funding sources from Federal, State, and local partners.

Once again, I respectfully request a favorable report of Senate Bill 288 to close this loophole and ensure our State laws ensure everyone in our community can live in decent and safe housing. My delegates and I often say that we were not the generation that created this problem, but we refuse to be the generation that allows it to continue. There are often difficult challenges before this Committee and body with no certain answers. But our job is to find the balance, to find the justice and fairness for the people we represent. Senate Bill 288 represents that justice.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sarah Elfret". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sarah Elfret