
BILL NO: House Bill 231
TITLE: Housing Opportunities Made Equal (HOME) Act
COMMITTEE: Environment and Transportation
HEARING DATE: February 4, 2020
POSITION: SUPPORT

House Bill 231 amends Maryland's Fair Housing law to prohibit discrimination by landlords and other property owners based on the source of the income the prospective renter will be using to pay for the housing. Adequate housing is critical to the health and safety of women and children. The Women's Law Center of Maryland supports House Bill 231 because it helps ensure that women have equal access to housing options without discrimination based on the sources of the funds often used by women to pay for housing.

Included in the definition of source of income is lawful income from a profession or occupation, government assistance or rental assistance program (Section 8 voucher), alimony or child support. Denial of rental housing to an otherwise qualified person simply because they plan to pay the rent with one of these lawful sources of income is unfair and unjustifiable. Women often rely on these sources of income; therefore they are disproportionately affected by this discrimination.

In addition, discrimination based on source of income should be prohibited because it results in concentrations of poverty which have been shown to have a negative health impact on the well-being of women and families. A study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* concluded that women who moved to areas of lower concentration of poverty reduced their risk of diabetes and obesity. Other studies have shown that living in areas with economic advantages have a positive impact on educational and health outcomes.

In Maryland, Howard, Montgomery and Frederick Counties and the cities of Frederick, Annapolis and Baltimore City (for some properties) currently have laws that prohibit discrimination in housing based on source of income. At least eleven other states have similar laws. Maryland should join these other jurisdictions to support greater housing and economic opportunity for low-income renters.

House Bill 231 ensures fairness and housing opportunities for low-income and female headed households. Therefore, the Women's Law Center strongly urges a favorable report on House Bill 231.

The Women's Law Center of Maryland is a private, non-profit, membership organization that serves as a leading voice for justice and fairness for women. It advocates for the rights of women through legal assistance to individuals and strategic initiatives to achieve systemic change. The Women's Law Center operates two legal hotlines, Protection Order Advocacy and Representation Projects in Baltimore City, Baltimore County and Carroll County, and the statewide Collateral Legal Assistance for Survivors and Multi-Ethnic Domestic Violence Projects.