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Greater Greater Washington

Testimony: HB 1406

March 3, 2020

Good afternoon. My name is Alex Baca and I'm testifying on behalf of Greater Greater Washington, a media and policy organization advocating for a more accessible, affordable DC region. We work in the District, northern Virginia, and Montgomery and Prince George's counties. We fully support HB 1406 and thank Delegate Stewart for introducing it today.

My title is housing program organizer. One of the goals of GGWash's housing program is to eliminate exclusionary land-use practices like single-family zoning, which makes it illegal to build attached, multifamily homes, from duplexes all the way up to apartments.

Many people like this, because single-family zoning, as it exists in America, was specifically designed to protect individuals' property values. It does so by excluding things that are proxies for race or class; *Euclid v. Ambler* says, "very often the apartment house is a mere parasite." We've codified and prioritized single-family housing to such an extent that it's nearly impossible to build anything but in Maryland's affluent areas.

My dad is from Harford County. My mom was born in Baltimore, like her parents. I grew up in Severna Park. My mom's family decamped to the County in the 1960s. My parents repeated this process when they had me: Federal Hill gentrifiers in the 1980s, they moved to Severna Park when I was three, for the schools. Ultimately, they sent me to private school, anyway; I graduated from Key School, here, and attended University of Maryland.

UMD was the first racially and economically diverse setting that I really experienced. I know now there is a direct link between what types of homes you can build in Severna Park and the fact that it is 92 percent white. I do not consider a 92 percent white municipality, in a state that is nearly half non-white, a model of integration, inclusion, tolerance, access, equality, or equity.

I deeply respect that my parents did what they thought was best for me, and that their parents did what they thought was best for them. But I don't think I distinctly benefited from growing up in a place where you aren't allowed to build duplexes, or apartments like the one I live in now, or even rowhomes like the one that my mom grew up in in Baltimore city.

I did not grow up benefiting from zoning laws that keep out the kind of modest homes we are discussing today. As a result, I don't think that government should protect the affluence of places like Severna Park to the extent that it does.

There is an enormity of scholarship demonstrating that single-family zoning is segregationist, that it makes housing more expensive, and that it hastens climate change, from which some Marylanders are already refugees. That research is too substantial to cite here today, though I welcome any opportunity to discuss it further.

Excluding anything but single-family homes—which is the case in the majority of Maryland—is a proxy for excluding other people. Voting in support of HB 1406 demonstrates that you are willing to wield land-use laws in a more inclusive way than this country has historically chosen to. Please support the Modest Homes Choice Act. Thank you.