

March 4, 2020

Environment and Transportation Committee
House Office Building, Room 251
Annapolis, MD 21401

**HB 1406, Land Use – Development – Middle Housing (Modest Homes Choice Act of 2020)
(Support)
Testimony for March 4, 2020**

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Thank you, Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and Environment and Transportation Committee members. This testimony is on behalf of the Coalition for Smarter Growth, the leading organization in the D.C. region advocating for walkable, inclusive, transit-oriented communities. We are strongly in favor of the Modest Homes Choice Act, a bill that will increase housing options throughout Maryland.

HB 1406 legalizes multifamily housing in neighborhoods with higher incomes, an abundance of job opportunities, and access to good public transit. This is the core of smart growth: targeting growth in the right places so that our neighborhoods are more inclusive, sustainable, and prosperous.

Economic: An abundant housing stock is critical to Maryland's economic competitiveness. A 2016 [economic competitiveness report](#) from the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments found that high housing costs is one of the three major trends threatening our regional economy. Allowing more housing options will give the market the ability to respond to major job growth. Furthermore, housing closer to jobs will reduce travel times on Maryland's famously congested roadways.

Equity: Right now, owning a home is prohibitively expensive for many families for many reasons, including that the supply of housing in high-demand areas hasn't kept pace with demand. For example, 47 percent of land in Montgomery County is zoned for single-family detached housing only, restraining the amount of new housing allowed and limiting the diversity of housing options.

The difference between a \$600,000 single family home and a \$400,000 duplex can be the difference between a family being able to afford access to better jobs, better schools, healthier food, and so much more. It's time for our zoning to reflect our inclusive values.

Sustainability: Housing in the right location is a climate solution. When families can't afford to live close to where they work, they "drive until they qualify," searching farther and farther out for affordable housing. This results in both increased traffic congestion and increased greenhouse gas emissions. In California, increases in vehicle miles traveled completely cancelled out any environmental benefits of more electric vehicles. At a time when transportation is our largest source of emissions in Maryland, we need to allow more housing in places that will result in less driving.

This bill is part of a larger “Homes for All” legislative package, which includes two other bills: HB 1149, which creates a program to finance social housing projects, and HB 744, which is an omnibus renter’s rights bill. Our housing crises is multifaceted, and it’s vital to attack it with a variety of tools since no solution is a silver bullet. Zoning is one of the most powerful tools we have to increase the supply of housing and assure abundant, diverse housing options for Marylanders in all stages of life and at all ranges of income.

Therefore, we urge you to support HB 1406 and legalize more housing and more housing options where they are most needed. Thank you for your consideration.