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Writer's Direct Dial No.

410-576-6986

February 4, 2019

To: The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.
Chair, Judicial Proceedings Committee

From: Kira Wilpone-Welborn
Staff Attorney

Re: Senate Bill 530 – Housing Opportunities Made Equal Act (SUPPORT)

The Consumer Protection Division of the Office of the Attorney General supports Senate Bill 530 sponsored by Senators Smith, Augustine, Beidle, Benson, Carter, Elfreth, Ellis, Feldman, Griffith, Guzzone, Hayes, Hester, Kagan, Kelley, King, Kramer, Lam, Lee, Patterson, Peters, Pinsky, Sydnor, Waldstreicher, Washington, Young and Zucker, which would update Maryland's fair housing laws and prohibit a person from refusing to rent or sell consumer realty to another because of their source of income. Moreover, as the City of Annapolis, Anne Arundel County, Baltimore City, Baltimore County, the City of Frederick, Frederick County, Howard County, Montgomery County, and Prince George's County have prohibitions on discrimination based on source of income, Senate Bill 530 would create a uniform policy of non-discrimination for all Marylanders.

Of particular importance, Senate Bill 530 would prohibit housing providers from refusing to lease consumer realty to persons only because of their use of rental assistance programs, such as vouchers issued pursuant to the United States Housing Act of 1937. Under the current law, landlords are permitted to refuse to rent or sell consumer realty on the sole basis of an individual's source of income. As a result, individuals relying on rental assistance or housing vouchers are unable to obtain the intended benefit of the governmental assistance, namely access to housing in the open market. Prohibiting discrimination based on one's source of income impairs the ability of Maryland consumers to access the full scope of available homes. Not only could Senate Bill 530 instill a uniform anti-discrimination policy in Maryland but could expand the market of consumer realty to more Marylanders while decreasing concentrations of poverty and increasing access to opportunity zones.

Accordingly, the Division requests that the Judicial Proceedings Committee give Senate Bill 530 a favorable report.

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