

Thank you Chairman and Senators for allowing me to speak before you today. A warm hello to my own Senator who represents my family, the very honorable Senator West.

I am a Baltimore County resident and would like to offer testimony in support of the HOME Act, HB0231. My name is Yara Cheikh. I am a member of the League Women Voters Baltimore County and the mother of four children enrolled in Baltimore County Public Schools, today, my advocacy blends my years as an education advocate and as a businesswoman together. I am a landlord and manager of several properties in the 21204, 21234 and 21212 zip codes all in Baltimore County.

As a business owner I know that concentrations of poverty hinder economic growth throughout the State. The HOME Act helps to prevent further concentrations of poverty. The values of my property are not threatened by the HOME Act. It does not impede my right to determine tenancy based on good credit and good past tenancy.

Simply, it keeps landlords unable to discriminate on the basis of renters having the means to pay the rent. A voucher holder must still prove the ability to pay whatever discrepancies exist between the voucher credit and advertised rent.

Currently, in Baltimore County, more than one third of voucher holders are elderly citizens. One third of voucher holders are disabled. Clearly, as landlords we should be actively seeking to be fair to these possible renters.

The HOME Act requires that Landlords be fairer. We, have arrived at this exact moment because past landlords did discriminate against renters on the basis of race, socioeconomic status, and religion. We can do better and this bill moves us forward.

Critics of the bill argue that this stipulation will further concentrate poverty in particular neighborhoods, but that is simply not true.

As an education advocate, I applaud the HOME Act and these efforts. By empowering voucher program participants to move throughout my

County, we are not concentrating poverty in any one area. Currently, the State of Maryland has 384,470 students eligible for free and reduced meals. Public school data reported to the U.S. Department of Education during the 2016-2017 school year shows that an estimated 16,267 public school students experienced homelessness over the course of the year. Of that total, 267 students were unsheltered, 1,641 were in shelters, 1,549 were in hotels/motels, and 12,810 were doubled up. Our state has a crisis of fair housing for our most vulnerable residents.

On the Education Committee of the League of Women Voters, I have had the opportunity to visit schools across the State. You, yourselves, know of the incredible inequity in opportunity children face across the State.

When children of various socioeconomic and racial backgrounds learn together, the vast majority of studies show that every child across the socioeconomic spectrum benefit. Most recently, Stanford University's [Prudence L. Carter](#), the University of Massachusetts-Amherst's [Linda R. Tropp](#), and Loyola University of New Orleans' [Robert A. Garda Jr.](#), have found that skills like cross-cultural collaboration, critical thinking, problem-solving, effective communication, reduced racial prejudice, and empathy are best fostered in diverse classrooms.

The HOME Act enables families to have more school choice by having community choice.

This is the right thing to do for working families, the elderly, the disabled and all of our citizens. As a landlord, education advocate and proud Marylander, I want to improve the quality of life for our residents, not concentrate poverty. That hurts all of us.

Please pass the HOME Act.