

Testimony to the Senate Education, Health and Environmental Committee
SB367 – Housing and Community Development - Neighborhood Revitalization Programs - Application Requirements
February 5, 2021
Position: UNFAVORABLE

Dear Chairman Pinsky & Members of the Education, Health and Environmental Committee:

On behalf of MHP, I urge the committee to oppose Senate Bill 367 - Housing and Community Development - Neighborhood Revitalization Programs - Application Requirements, which would require an application for DHCD Neighborhood Revitalization programs to include a letter of support from the legislative district in which a proposed project is based.

By way of background, MHP is a non-profit housing provider with apartment communities located throughout Montgomery and Prince George's Counties. Our mission includes preserving and expanding quality affordable housing as well as community development work which is aimed improving conditions in neighborhoods that have suffered from disinvestment and neglect.

MHP regularly applies for funding through DHCD programs such as Community Legacy and the National Capital Strategic Economic Development Fund to support affordable housing and community development projects in Montgomery and Prince George's County. Most recently, we sought funding through Community Legacy to support the rehab of an apartment building in Takoma Park and the restoration of a historic building in the Long Branch neighborhood of Silver Spring.

As a matter of course, we always seek community input and support for our projects, whether it be from local residents, neighborhood associations, or elected officials. However, explicitly requiring projects to obtain a letter of support from their legislative district will introduce one more way for opponents of housing to stop much needed affordable housing projects from being built. History has shown us that this requirement will used a way to discriminate against low-income people and people of color.

On its face, the requirement may seem innocuous, but in practice the requirement will likely block many worthwhile projects from moving forward. Local letters of support have had a long history of being used to block affordable housing and tools for local jurisdictions or individual elected officials to have veto power over a project. The Maryland Legislature has taken this requirement off from most DHCD programs and now, in the time of a pandemic and when there is great need for affordable housing and community development projects to proceed, is not the time to reinstate such a requirement.

Local planning, zoning, and building permit processes provide the appropriate means for local residents and local jurisdictions to have input on these projects. Let's not add additional unnecessary barriers to these important projects.

For all the above reasons, we respectfully request an UNFAVORABLE report.

Submitted by Robert Goldman, President of MHP