



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 764

Workgroup on Adaptive Reuse of Vacant Commercial Spaces

Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

February 23, 2021

Submitted by Stacey Jefferson and Julia Gross, Co-Chairs

Member Agencies:

Advocates for Children and Youth
Baltimore Jewish Council
Behavioral Health System Baltimore
CASH Campaign of Maryland
Catholic Charities
Episcopal Diocese of Maryland
Family League of Baltimore
Fuel Fund of Maryland
Health Care for the Homeless
Homeless Persons
Representation Project
Job Opportunities Task Force
League of Women Voters of Maryland
Loyola University Maryland
Maryland Catholic Conference
Maryland Center on Economic Policy
Maryland Community Action
Partnership
Maryland Family Network
Maryland Hunger Solutions
Paul's Place
Public Justice Center
St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore
Welfare Advocates

Marylanders Against Poverty

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Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) supports SB 764, which establishes the Workgroup on Adaptive Reuse of Vacant Commercial Spaces that will study the potential for converting vacant commercial spaces into residential spaces in order to increase affordable housing options.

There is critical lack of affordable housing options for low-income individuals and families in Maryland. Maryland is the 8th most unaffordable state for housing. In order to afford the Fair Market Rent (FMR) for a two-bedroom unit in Maryland, a person would have to work over 100 hours per week without paying more than 30% of income on housing-related expenses.¹ Unfortunately, the challenges of residing in a state with high living costs are borne disproportionately by the poor.

MAP strongly encourages investment in efforts to create affordable housing for low-income households, like SB 764. In 2004, DHCD's Office of Research compiled data for Governor Ehrlich's Commission on Housing Policy to highlight the shortage of affordable housing by county.² Overall, DHCD projected a need for 120,486 additional units of affordable housing by 2014. Over a decade later, the State has made inadequate progress towards meeting the needs outlined in the report, as the Department of Legislative Services recently noted federal data showing "there is a shortage of approximately 190,700 affordable rental housing units [in Maryland] for families earning less than 50% of the area median income."³ Given the large and ever growing need for affordable housing in Maryland, coupled with the dire economic ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic, creating a workgroup to study how to utilize newly vacant commercial spaces to create additional affordable housing units to meet the needs of our community members is a worthy endeavour.

Safe, quality, and affordable housing is the foundation of healthy communities, families, and individuals. **MAP appreciates your consideration, and strongly urges a favorable report on SB 764.**

Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) is a coalition of service providers, faith communities, and advocacy organizations advancing statewide public policies and programs necessary to alleviate the burdens faced by Marylanders living in or near poverty, and to address the underlying systemic causes of poverty.

¹ National Low Income Housing Coalition (2020). *Out of Reach*. <https://reports.nlihc.org/oor>

² Governor's Commission on Housing Policy. (2004.) *Innovative Housing and Community Revitalization in Maryland: Solutions for a Positive Change*. www.msa.md.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc5300/sc5339/000113/001000/001578/unrestricted/20054454e.pdf

³ Maryland Department of Legislative Services. (2015). *Overview of Homelessness and Homeless Services in Maryland*. http://dls.state.md.us/data/polanasubare/polanasubare_heandhumser/overview-of-homelessness-and-homeless-services-in-maryland.pdf.