



# POSITION STATEMENT

**TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE**

**HOUSE BILL 560 -- HUMAN RELATIONS - DISCRIMINATION IN HOUSING --  
REENTRY-INTO-SOCIETY STATUS**

**Sponsor – Delegate Fennell**

**February 9, 2021**

**DONALD C. FRY  
PRESIDENT & CEO**

**GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE**

**Position: Support**

The Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) supports House Bill 560. This legislation expands Maryland’s fair housing protections to all citizens including those in a reentry-into-society status. Specifically, the bill prohibits a person from refusing to sell or rent a dwelling to any person because of reentry-into-society status and prohibits a person from discriminating against any person in the terms, conditions, or privileges of the sale or rental of a dwelling because of reentry-into-society status. The bill defines reentry-into-society status as having completed a court-ordered sentence of imprisonment.

According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition’s study entitled *Housing’s Effect on Criminal Justice Reform*, housing access is a key metric to predicting and preventing recidivism. Studies have shown that people with criminal records who lived on the street were rearrested at double the rates of those who secured housing, and recently released parolees were seven times more likely to abscond if they lived in homeless shelters compared to those who had secured some form of housing. A 2004 Urban Institute study in Baltimore found that among those released from jail, one-third did not report having a place to live on release. Surveys of formerly incarcerated individuals and their families have yielded the following findings:

- 79% of survey participants were ineligible or denied housing because of their own or a loved one’s conviction history
- 58% of survey participants were currently living with family members while only 9% were living in transitional housing
- 1 in 10 survey participants reported family members being evicted upon the return of the formerly incarcerated individual

The aforementioned studies have illustrated that restricted access to housing prevents many ex-offenders from being able to move forward and become productive members of society. The stigma surrounding individuals with criminal histories is so prevalent that it restrains their opportunities, leaving them few avenues besides a return to criminality. This legislation would allow these group to overcome a significant barrier that prevents them from re-engaging into society.

Improving public safety through enhanced coordination among criminal justice agencies, implementing comprehensive violence reduction strategies, and coordinating re-entry services is identified as one of the Greater Baltimore Committee’s 2021 legislative priorities.

**GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE**

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Equal access to housing and the prevention of housing discrimination due to past criminal records is a crucial component to give ex-offenders the opportunity to reform by removing the barriers for their re-entry into society. The positive correlation between a region's rates of housing stability and economic vitality shows that providing housing access to citizens with re-entry into society status will have a positive impact on Maryland's economic health.

**For these reasons, the Greater Baltimore Committee urges a favorable report on House Bill 560.**

*The Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) is a non-partisan, independent, regional business advocacy organization comprised of hundreds of businesses -- large, medium and small -- educational institutions, nonprofit organizations and foundations located in Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Harford, and Howard counties as well as Baltimore City. The GBC is a 66-year-old, private-sector membership organization with a rich legacy of working with government to find solutions to problems that negatively affect our competitiveness and viability.*