



House Bill 515

Committee: Environment and Transportation Committee

Date: February 2, 2021

Position: Unfavorable

This testimony is offered on behalf of the Maryland Multi-Housing Association (MMHA). MMHA is a professional trade association established in 1996, whose members consist of owners and managers of more than 210,000 rental housing homes in over 958 apartment communities. Our members house over 538,000 residents of the State of Maryland. MMHA also represents over 250 associate member companies who supply goods and services to the multi-housing industry.

With certain exceptions, House Bill 515 prohibits a person from denying a candidate access to an apartment building for the purpose of campaigning for elected office, registering voters, or distributing campaign material. A candidate is broadly defined as an individual who files a certificate of candidacy for public or party office, including individuals who have not filed a certificate of candidacy but have established a campaign finance entity. For complexes with multiple apartment buildings, the owner must make all of the apartment buildings available to the candidate during the same visit.

MMHA respectfully opposes HB 515 due its interference with tenants' peaceable enjoyment of their residence, unforeseen costs and liability, and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Apartment complexes are constructed as private and secure buildings designed for tenants to peaceably enjoy their residences. By requiring that owners admit candidates into complexes, HB 515 directly infringes upon that private and secure design. Moreover, HB 515's requirement that candidate appointments be scheduled at a time when the most residents are home ensures maximum interference with a tenant's right to peaceably enjoy their residence.

The bill creates significant logistical and staffing issues for landlords. Due to the secure design of buildings and complexes, different keys are often required to access different areas of complexes. Thus, property owners will be required to provide an escort to candidates during their time on the premises. The months during which candidates will be most active is also the time that buildings and complexes are conducting the most seasonal change maintenance and renovations. As such, the bill's requirement that candidates enjoy access during the 6 months preceding an election will further complicate logistical and staffing issues.

Due to HB 515's broad definition of candidate, a large number of individuals will access apartment complexes at times when the most residents are home. In addition to increased costs from employees escorting candidates through complexes, owners of apartment complexes will be liable for incidents that occur due to a candidate's presence on the property. The increased cost and liability placed on property owners by HB 515 is completely unnecessary given the numerous opportunities currently available for candidates to contact Marylanders, including social media, mail, and public meetings.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic that has resulted in a substantial number of hospitalizations and deaths across the state, protecting all residents from exposure to the virus is an absolute priority. By requiring that candidates be admitted into apartment complexes to meet tenants, HB 515 increases the likelihood of exposure to COVID-19 and ultimately risks the safety of more Marylanders.



Under current law, candidates may request to enter apartment complexes, mail information to tenants, or campaign on public property outside an apartment complex. By forcing access into apartment complexes, HB 515 unnecessarily infringes upon tenants' private enjoyment of their residence, exposes property owners to potential liability and increased costs, and risks the safety of tenants. For these reasons, MMHA respectfully requests an unfavorable report from the committee on HB 515.