

Howard County Housing Affordability Coalition

Maryland General Assembly
Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee Hearing
March 31, 2022

Department of Housing and Community Development—Housing Opportunities Trust Fund
HB0878-2022 – Position: Favorable

Good afternoon. Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan and Committee members. My name is Jackie Eng and it is a privilege to testify today on behalf of the Howard County Housing Affordability Coalition. The Coalition is comprised of 69 individuals and nonprofit organizations that advocate within our County to increase the availability of housing that is affordable and accessible to households with limited and/or fixed incomes. The Coalition strongly supports HB0878. We appreciate our Howard County Delegation introducing this legislation that will authorize establishing the Howard County Housing Opportunities Trust Fund.

The need for affordable rental housing and home ownership opportunities in Howard County has been well documented, most recently in our *2021 Housing Opportunities Master Plan* and the background generated in the current initiative that will update the County's General Plan. The Housing Master Plan specifically recommends creation of a "Trust Fund, which is a formal, coordinated and predictable structure for allocating housing funding." HB0878 is the critical first step in establishing such a fund and enabling the County's Department of Housing and Community Development to put in place the administrative structure to ensure the legislation's goal of "equitable access to affordable housing for households of limited income in Howard County."

The \$121,000 median income, the \$2300 average 2 bedroom rent, and the \$509,000 resale price of a home, present extraordinary barriers to too many of our community's households. In Howard County there are 9,000 eligible low-income renter households, but only 2600 affordable rental units. Among low-income seniors there are 4500 eligible households but only 1000 affordable units. We have 120 residents with disabilities who are currently on the State's 811 waiting list. One in four of our County renters are severely cost-burdened--paying more than 50% of their gross income on housing. This is an increase of 33% since 2010.

Howard County studies related to economic growth and quality of life have observed that much of the current and future economic success of the County depends on it's continuing to be an appealing place to live and work, which means continued investment in first tier infrastructure—education, transportation and most certainly housing. A critical element of the County's economic appeal depends on the availability of equitable and affordable housing opportunities for all people who want to live here. The lack of such housing ultimately will hamper the ability for Howard County to grow as an economic hub as it becomes hard to recruit workers who are priced out of the local housing market.

Housing Trust Funds have been used successfully in other jurisdictions across the country and particularly in neighboring jurisdictions to support clear action plans that facilitate an affordable housing vision and long-term strategies. Importantly, a non-reverting Housing Trust Fund will provide a vehicle enabling diversified, including private, funding that can augment County contributions to ensure that the Fund is sustainable over the long-term.

For the County and for our current and future low and moderate-income residents, we urge the Committee to issue a favorable report for HB0878.

Thank you for your consideration of the Coalition's perspective.

Respectfully,
Jacqueline Eng

Jacqueline Eng, Coalition Coordinator