



CITY OF HAGERSTOWN, MARYLAND

Scott Nicewarner
City Administrator

One East Franklin Street • Hagerstown, MD 21740

E-mail: snicewarner@hagerstownmd.org

Telephone: 301.766.4168 • TDD: 301.797.6617 • Website: www.hagerstownmd.org

February 22, 2023

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401-1911

RE: Senate Bill 563 – Property Maintenance and Nuisance Condition Violation Judgments and Foreclosure Proceedings

Please accept this letter as written testimony in **support** of this proposed legislation by Senator Paul Corderman and Senator Mike McKay.

Hagerstown, as do several other municipalities within our region, suffer significant areas of blight that impede or destroy a neighborhoods ability to feel safe, live in quality housing with quality amenities, and provide a healthy home environment. The community looks to local government to partner with them in the effort of cleaning up their neighborhoods to allow them to afford just these inalienable rights they as City residents should be able to enjoy.

This legislation is another tool in the toolbox to help us, help them, take their neighborhoods back from blighted conditions. This legislation allows those parcels that remain taxes current, yet continue to accrue monthly abatement charges from the City for high grass and weeds, trash, unsecure doors and windows (mainly broken or completely removed), and other health issues that affect those that not only reside on a block but may reside in the parcel immediately adjacent to the property. These parcels also have owners that have either bailed on the property yet continue to have escrow accounts utilized for yearly tax draws, have stopped communicating for whatever reason, or are behind faceless LLC's which simply cut a check each year from the tax bill and have never seen nor care to maintain the property.

The City is able to readily identify these parcels through our property abatement system and its integration with our tax management system. By allowing the liens placed on a parcel from these unpaid abatement invoices and if not paid, allowing the property to go to tax sale, it provides municipalities to have another tool in which to either (1) get the attention of an owner or trust or holder of title that an action is being taken on the property, or (2) allow the municipality through the court system to take deed to that parcel as specified in the legislation and remediate the property. Many of these parcels are capable of rehabilitation and put to good use as permanent or transient housing opportunities through our social agencies and other non-profits that work with housing assistance.

The last thing the City of Hagerstown wants to do is get into the real estate business either as a landlord or a property owner. Also, to be clear, this legislation would not affect tenant or owner - occupied properties. Blighted structures that are occupied would be worked out with the owners



of the property as we do now. Only in those instances where owners cannot be found would we take additional steps outside of the purview of this legislation. Our situation is such that without the ability to remediate the seemingly increasing conditions of blight especially within our urban core which is already struggling with other societal issues, we cannot expect to begin making inroads in bringing our neighborhoods up and taking our neighborhoods back to provide quality, affordable and safe housing for those that need it the most. With that, I ask for your support on this bill. Thank you for this opportunity to speak today.

Sincerely,

THE CITY OF HAGERSTOWN

Scott A. Nicewander

City Administrator