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March 28, 2023

To: The Honorable Brian J. Feldman, Chair
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

From: Monica Best-James, Chair
Consumer Council of Maryland

Re: House Bill 844 – Housing and Community Development - Common Ownership
Community Website (SUPPORT)

The Consumer Council of Maryland supports House Bill 844, sponsored by Delegates Pasteur and Holmes, which would require the Department of Housing and Community Development to establish and maintain a website that provides information on the rights and responsibilities of individuals living in common ownership communities (COCs). The Consumer Council is an advisory body to the Consumer Protection Division in the Office of the Attorney General with members representing businesses, consumers and the public who are appointed by the Governor.

A growing number of the homes bought and sold in Maryland are located in COCs, as residents strive to find affordable housing for their families. Despite this fact, there is insufficient information provided by the State of Maryland regarding COCs. Currently, the state lacks a user-friendly source of information regarding the rights and responsibilities of living in such communities.

In 2006, the Task Force on Common Ownership Communities finalized the report on its efforts to study various concerns related to COCs, including the need for education and training of community boards of current and prospective homeowners, dispute resolution services, and the provisions of the Uniform Common Interest Ownership Act of 1994. In the report, the Task Force members defined their objectives to include the following: a) define the key issues which impact the health and viability of common ownership communities; b) analyze six areas of significant problems; and c) build consensus regarding balanced and affordable reforms for recommendation. The report was finalized with the assistance of staff provided by the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development.

In its 2006 Final Report, one of the recommendations from the Task Force was that the state sponsor and approve a website regarding the rights and responsibilities of living in COCs. It was also suggested that the website could be hosted by an appropriate State agency. Further, that it should contain, among other items,

information on the “best practices” in common ownership community boards and provide hyperlinks to relevant and informative websites.

House Bill 844 reflects the recommendation regarding the creation of a website proposed by the Task Force on Common Ownership Communities in the Final Report. Further, this legislation is introduced at the request of, and is supported by, the Consumer Council of Maryland.

For the reasons articulated above, we **respectfully** request that the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee return a **Favorable Report** on this legislation.

Cc: The Honorable Cheryl E. Pasteur
The Honorable Marvin E. Holmes, Jr.
Members, Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee