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BILL NO.: **HB 826**

TITLE: Statewide Rental Assistance Voucher Program – Establishment

SPONSOR: Delegate Wilkins

COMMITTEE: Environment and Transportation

POSITION: **SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS**

DATE: February 28, 2023

Baltimore County **SUPPORTS WITH AMENDMENTS** HB 826 – Statewide Rental Assistance Voucher Program – Establishment.

House Bill 826 establishes a Statewide Assistance Voucher Program in the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development to provide vouchers and housing assistance payments for low-income families that are on a waiting list under the federal Housing Choice Voucher Program. This statewide program would be administrated by State DHCD and local Public Housing Agencies.

The bill in many respects mirrors the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) Housing Choice Voucher Program, which provides financial assistance to low-income families with housing needs, with some key differences. HB 826 would prioritize financial assistance to families with children under 16 years of age, military veterans, individuals experiencing homelessness, and disabled or elderly individuals for up to five years.

Baltimore County recognizes the critical need to provide assistance to some of our most vulnerable residents and supports the establishment of such a statewide program. Below we offer recommendations for amendments to further strengthen the bill and its implementation by Counties like ours.

1. The costs of administering a voucher program far exceeds the 1% allowed for in HB 826. As such, we request an increase in allowable administrative costs that more closely align with how HUD allots to each respective Public Housing Authority.

2. To make this State program consistent with current HUD law and regulations, Baltimore County also requests:

a. The time to provide documentation for verification be extended to 30 days with the local Public Housing Agency having the discretion to extend another 30 days;

b. Language in Section 4-2911(B) pertaining to three or more notices making a property ineligible should be changed to ensure that we preserve affordable housing units. We recommend adding “unless remedied to the satisfaction of the Public Housing Agency”;

c. The list of priorities outlined in the bill do not necessarily line up with how most PHAs are required to prioritize households from their waitlist pursuant to HUD regulations and jurisdictions’ respective PHA Administrative Plans and may therefore conflict with how waitlists are administered/managed. We understand the importance of these statewide priorities and their alignment with the overall goals and needs of the State and believe upon further discussion and research, this can be remedied.

3. HUD’s Housing Choice Voucher program uses outdated Fair Market Rents (FMRs) to allocate vouchers, we request that the methodology used to distribute these vouchers be codified differently from the current HUD model to focus on jurisdictional need, not just FMRs.

Baltimore County fully supports the creation of a State housing voucher program that aligns with current Federal programs; such a program will increase resources and supports for local efforts to house residents in safe and affordable units. Accordingly, Baltimore County requests a **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** report on HB 826. For more information, please contact Jenn Aiosa, Director of Government Affairs at jaiosa@baltimorecountymd.gov.