



11400 Rockville Pike, Suite 505
Rockville, Maryland 20852

T (301) 493-6000
F (301) 493-9788
victoryhousing.org

**With respect to House Bill 852
Testimony to the House Environment and Transportation Committee:
February 24, 2024**

Victory Housing provides affordable housing to low- and moderate-income independent seniors and families and assisted living for seniors. For over forty years, Victory Housing, inspired by Catholic social teachings and serving as the nonprofit housing development arm of the Catholic Archdiocese of Washington, has pursued this mission. Currently, we have over 2800 units in our portfolio across Washington, DC and Montgomery, Prince Georges, Charles, St. Mary's counties in Maryland. At Victory Housing, we lead with compassion, are accountable for our work, respect everyone, excel in our results and sustain our mission.

One of the significant problems facing Maryland is the lack of safe, affordable housing for vulnerable populations. It reaches into every community in our State, causing untold individual suffering and social ills. In our efforts to provide affordable housing for seniors and families and assisted living for seniors, we have developed affordable and mixed-income communities on land made available by the Catholic Archdiocese, land won through competitive processes with government entities and land purchased privately. We welcome legislative efforts that seek to expand the development of affordable housing in our communities. We are favorable with that intent behind the amendments on HB 852.

The intent of this legislation seems to be aimed at encouraging counties to consider applications for the development of affordable housing from bona fide religious organizations under the expedited development review process. To achieve this goal, applications for development of affordable housing presented by or on behalf of religious organizations should qualify for expedited review if they meet the requirements that local law would impose on any other proposed development.

To fulfill the intent of the legislation we would respectfully ask that you consider the following amendments that we believe would remedy the bill and help it fulfill its stated intent:

1. On page 3, delete lines 17 -22 and replace with the following language: “shall meet the county's standards eligible for expedited review.” As written currently, counties that have expedited review processes for affordable housing might interpret the deleted language to mean that (1) they need to have a different approval process to enter expedited review for religious or religious affiliated organizations and/or (2) that religious or religious affiliated organizations can ONLY develop affordable housing on their own land.

~~(I) — RESERVE AT LEAST 50% OF THE DWELLING UNITS IN THE PROPOSED AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT FOR INDIVIDUALS WHOSE HOUSEHOLD INCOME IS LESS THAN OR EQUAL TO 80% OF THE AREA MEDIAN INCOME; AND~~

~~(II) — (II) DEVELOP THE AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT ON PROPERTY OWNED BY THE ORGANIZATION.~~

2. Delete subsection (C). We believe this section is unconstitutional and no county should develop a policy that prohibits the consideration of applications from religious organizations. This subsection C) allows a county to bar expedited religious -backed developments if that county adopts, on or before June 30, 2024, a local law that bars religious-backed developments from expedited review. This provision affirming such religious discrimination if it did exist (we are not aware of any county adopting a local law prohibiting expedited review of applications based on the religious nature or affiliation of the applicant) would undermine the intent of the bill to promote rather than constrain development of affordable housing.

~~(2) ADOPTS A LOCAL LAW PROHIBITING THE CONSIDERATION OF APPLICATIONS FROM RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS UNDER THE EXPEDITED DEVELOPMENT REVIEW PROCESS.~~

Since subsection C is also referenced in the introductory phrase, we would also ask to delete the following language in the introductory phrase in (B)(1) “except as provided in subsection C of this section” and begin instead with the “on or after....”

Thank you for your work to increase affording housing development in Maryland, we ask you to issue a favorable report with amendments on HB 852.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,



Leila A. Finucane
President & CEO