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February 29, 2024

Senator Brian J. Feldman, Chair
Senator Cheryl C. Kagan, Vice Chair
2 West
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Support for Senate Bill 484 Land Use - Affordable Housing - Zoning Density and Permitting (Housing Expansion and Affordability Act of 2024)

Hearing before the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee on March 1, 2024

Position: Support (FAV)

Dear Honorable Members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership (BRHP). I am writing to express our support for Senate Bill 484. BRHP is a non-profit organization that expands housing choices for families with low incomes who have historically been excluded from housing in well-resourced neighborhoods, helping them to access and transition successfully to safe, healthy, and economically vibrant communities.

As the Regional Administrator for the Baltimore Housing Mobility Program, BRHP has opened pathways to a better future for low-income families for over 10 years. BRHP currently provides over 4,300 low-income families with over \$80 million in rental assistance annually in the form of the Housing Choice Voucher and couples that with counseling supports for families as they move from areas of concentrated poverty to areas of opportunity in Baltimore City and the five surrounding counties. BRHP is dedicated to helping achieve racially and socially equitable public policy that ensures low-income families have access to quality and affordable homes in communities of their choice.

We are writing to express our support for the Housing Expansion and Affordability Act of 2024, a critical piece of legislation that aims to advance our shared goals of creating more equitable, diverse, and vibrant communities. We commend SB 484 for offering a timely and needed response to the urgent housing challenges facing our state. In 2020, the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development's Maryland Housing Needs

The Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership is an equal housing opportunity provider.





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Assessment described the state's need for nearly 85,000 rental units affordable to those earning 30% or less of area median income. Additionally, Governor Wes Moore's Administration has a goal of expanding the housing supply by 96,000 units. This can only be achieved by addressing key barriers to affordable housing development, including restrictive zoning laws and cumbersome permitting processes. This bill lays the groundwork for generating greater affordable housing options in Maryland. The provisions within this act are not merely policy changes; they are critical steps towards ensuring that all Marylanders have access to safe, affordable, and high-quality housing.

Forging Affordable Pathways to Homeownership and Multi-Family Housing

SB 484 recognizes the importance of diverse housing types in meeting the affordable housing needs of our communities and addresses a critical issue with housing policy and zoning laws that have disproportionately affected renters and low-income communities. Zoning laws in the US often favor single-family homes while restricting or creating barriers to the construction of more affordable housing options, such as manufactured homes, apartments, and multifamily units. As a result, housing choices for renters and low-income groups are often limited.

By mandating that local legislative bodies cannot prohibit the placement of new manufactured homes in zones that allow single-family residential uses, the act acknowledges the need for greater affordable housing options statewide. Furthermore, this provision aligns with broader efforts to reform zoning laws to be more inclusive and equitable, promoting a diversity of housing types and contributing to the creation of more mixed-income, diverse communities. This not only benefits individuals and families in need of affordable housing but also enriches communities by fostering greater social and economic diversity.

Preventing Unreasonable Denials and Restrictions

The act's efforts to prevent local jurisdictions from using elements of adequate public facilities laws (APFLs) to unreasonably deny or restrict state-funded affordable housing projects are crucial. These measures ensure that bureaucratic hurdles do not stand in the way of developing much-needed affordable housing by counteracting local jurisdictions' use of adequate public facilities laws and other regulatory mechanisms.

While the intention behind APFLs is to ensure that infrastructure keeps pace with development, these laws have at times been used to limit the development of affordable housing. APFLs may also be used to cite concerns about overburdened infrastructure to deny permits for affordable housing projects, which may contribute to housing shortages and exacerbate socioeconomic disparities. By prohibiting local jurisdictions from using APFLs to





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restrict certain housing construction, the act supports and encourages development that makes efficient use of available land and infrastructure.

Increasing Density and Mixed-Use Developments

Allowing greater density for qualified projects is critical for keeping up with housing supply demand. By allowing for higher density, the act aims to make more efficient use of land, support public transit, and provide more housing units in high-need areas – provisions which will encourage the development of vibrant, mixed-use communities that are accessible and sustainable. Additionally, we support that the act encourages mixed-use development and helps incentivize development and buy-in for the benefit of residents of all incomes. Moreover, BRHP strongly supports the inclusion of “middle housing,” including townhomes, duplexes, and other affordable housing options. As an organization providing rental assistance to thousands of families each year, we recognize the need for a diversity of housing types and options.

Streamlining the Approval Process

Establishing limits on the maximum number of public hearings for qualified projects is an important measure for streamlining the approval process. This will expedite the development of affordable housing projects, reducing costs and delays that often jeopardize completion of new housing units. We appreciate that the bill acknowledges the importance of prompt, swift action to seek stable and available housing options for Maryland renters.

We believe that the Housing Expansion and Affordability Act of 2024 represents a significant step forward in our collective efforts to address the housing shortage in Maryland, particularly the supply of affordable housing. By removing barriers to affordable housing development and promoting inclusivity and diversity in our communities, this act will have a lasting positive impact on Maryland in creating more inclusive, equitable, and diverse neighborhoods across our state. We appreciate your consideration and urge the Committee to issue a favorable report for SB 484.

Sincerely,

Adria Crutchfield

Adria Crutchfield

Executive Director

