<u>Written Testimony:</u> **SB0308 – Housing and Community Development – Just Community Designation**

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On behalf of the United Way of Central Maryland, Inc. (UWCM), I am 100% in favor of this piece of legislation. In summary it notes - *To Authorizing the Governor, on the recommendation of the Secretary of Housing and Community Development, to designate certain areas as Just Communities based on certain criteria; and providing for the prioritization of State funding for Just Communities to increase racial, economic, and health equity in the State.*

The work of UWCM and many of its partner organizations in Greater Baltimore and across the state have a mission, vision and set of core values that completely agree with the summarized version of Senate Bill 0308. UWCM promotes equity, access and opportunity so that no one is left behind. The mission of UWCM is improving lives by building leaders (from the boardroom to the block) and mobilizing the caring power of communities. The aspirational vision is happy, thriving communities where all people live their best lives – on their own terms. Our organization continues to scale its impact in partnership with other nonprofits, companies, educational institutions, government agencies and myriad stakeholders via implementing sustainable solutions in health, housing, economic advancement and education. The method of optimizing community advancement and empowerment is accomplished by deep listening and co-creating viable solutions with residents.

Just Communities can only materialize when select neighborhoods and their residents are placed front and center. Residents must be a core component of the desired and achieved results. UWCM anticipates doing all we can with the Governor's Office, the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development and others to fulfill this encouraging goal of designating such communities throughout our state.