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DATE: February 1, 2024
BILL NO.: Senate Bill 309
TITLE: Sustainable Growth Subcabinet and Repeal of the Office of Smart Growth
COMMITTEE: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Letter of Support

Description of Bill:

The legislation makes several changes to the State Government Article regarding the Smart Growth Subcabinet including changes in membership and changing language relating to the purpose of the Subcabinet. Senate Bill 309 would eliminate the Special Secretary position from the Subcabinet and transfer those responsibilities to the Secretary of Planning. It designates the Secretary of the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development as the vice chair of the Subcabinet and adds the Secretary of Emergency Management as a member of the Subcabinet.

Background and Analysis:

Established by the Governor, the Smart Growth Subcabinet began as the Smart Growth and Neighborhood Conservation Subcabinet in January 1998 (Executive Order 01.01.1998.04). It was established by statute effective July 1, 2001 (Chapter 566, Acts of 2001; Code State Government Article, sec. 9-1406). The Subcabinet helps implement Smart Growth Policy, recommending to the Governor changes in State law, regulations, and procedures needed to support the Policy (Chapter 759, Acts of 1997). Further, the Subcabinet works to create, enhance, support, and revitalize sustainable communities across Maryland (Chapter 487, Acts of 2010).

The Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) has historically played an active role in the Subcabinet, as both the Secretary of DHCD and DHCD's Assistant Secretary for Neighborhood Revitalization are members of the Subcabinet, and the Department administers several programs that support smart growth policy by financing development and revitalization activity in existing communities and areas planned for growth.

Senate Bill 309 makes important updates to the statute governing the Subcabinet to reflect current policy and practice. The Special Secretary for Smart Growth position has been vacant for some time and those responsibilities are being transferred to the Secretary of Planning. The Secretary of DHCD will become Vice Chair of the Subcabinet. This reflects the strong partnership between DHCD, the Maryland Department of Planning and the Subcabinet, as well as the partnership between DHCD and the Subcabinet in implementing revitalization programs and designations, including Sustainable Communities. The Secretary of Emergency Management is added as a member of the Subcabinet, reflecting in increased focus on resiliency and response to the effects of climate change. The legislation also adds language describing activities of the Subcabinet that reflect current policy and practice, including the words "equity" and "resiliency", and centers sustainability in mission of the Subcabinet. This language reflects the increased focus on equitable development to reduce and reverse the results of historic policies that contributed to ongoing disinvestment in redlined communities, as well as the imperative to respond to the challenge of climate change.

DHCD Position

The Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development respectfully requests a **favorable** report on SB 309

