

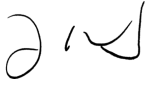
Robin Carter
Chairperson, Board of Commissioners

Janet Abrahams
President | Chief Executive Officer



SB 308

February 1, 2024

TO: Members of the Education, Energy and Environment Committee
FROM: Janet Abrahams, Chief Executive Officer 
RE: SB 308 – Housing and Community Development - Just Community Designation
POSITION: Support

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Housing Authority of Baltimore City (HABC) supports Senate Bill 308. The Housing and Community Development - Just Community Designation bill authorizes the Governor, on the recommendation of the Secretary of Housing and Community Development, to designate certain areas as Just Communities based on specific criteria and provides for the prioritization of State funding for Just Communities to increase racial, economic, and health equity in the State.

HABC is Baltimore’s largest provider of affordable housing opportunities, serving over 20,000 households (nearly 44,000 individuals) through our Public Housing and Housing Choice Voucher programs. HABC serves low- to extremely low-income families and individuals that consist of some of the city’s most vulnerable populations, including those at risk of homelessness, the elderly, persons with disabilities, veterans, and children. Historically, in Baltimore, public housing sites were built in segregated areas of the city with high concentrations of poverty. Generally, in these neighborhoods, there has been and continues to be limited access to quality schools, green space/recreation areas, grocery stores, healthcare facilities, financial institutions, transportation, etc. These areas also have high rates of unemployment and crime, high concentration of poverty and minority populations, and lower life-expectancy rates than in more affluent areas of the city.

Many of our public housing sites are in areas of the city that have suffered from decades of disinvestment, and much of our housing portfolio is aging and becoming obsolete. Therefore, HABC has undertaken several redevelopment projects including the Perkins, Somerset, Old town (PSO) Transformation Plan, Transform Poe and the revitalization of O'Donnell Heights. We are also in the process of reviewing and prioritizing redevelopment plans for our remaining public housing sites.

Annually, HABC has sought state funding from DHCD to move forward with current and future redevelopment efforts. It is our goal to replace and transform our public housing sites into mixed-income communities which includes infrastructure improvements, public safety strategies, and supports services designed to help our families increase economic self-sufficiency and improve educational outcomes. For

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example, within the PSO redevelopment and transformation is the construction of a new public school facility. City Springs will be rebuilt entirely with an added capacity to serve households and provide a 21st-century education in a state-of-the-art facility. The school will include a new athletic field and classroom space for early childhood through 8th-grade education. The plan also includes the creation of two new parks (North Central and South Central Parks), improvements to City Springs Park and pool, and renovation of the Chick Webb recreation center. In addition, the designs of green space in all areas of the transformation. A new grocery store will be built within the Somerset Phase, bringing a full-service grocery store to an area with none.

Prioritizing State funding in areas designated as Just Communities would provide HABC with the opportunity to revitalize our public housing stock without displacing those we serve and the possibility of bringing much needed economic development to these historically neglected neighborhoods.

HABC supports the Just Community Designation legislation to be used to prioritize state funding to increase racial, economic, and health equity in the state and particularly in Baltimore City. We respectfully request a favorable report on SB 308.

Respectfully submitted:

Janet Abrahams, HABC President & CEO