



HB 417

Baltimore County – Nuisance Actions – Community Association

Hearing before the House Environment and Transportation Committee

Feb. 27, 2024

POSITION: Favorable

Community Law Center (CLC) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, which is a legal partner to Maryland neighborhoods and nonprofits in pursuit of more just and vibrant communities. CLC provides direct legal representation to communities and nonprofits on issues like tax exemption and organizational governance, real estate, contracts, intellectual property, employment law, and more. We advocate on issues that impact our Maryland neighborhood and nonprofit clients, including to address nuisance and vacant properties.

CLC supports HB 417 to make it easier for Baltimore County communities to address nuisance issues in their neighborhoods.

In 2012, CLC supported a similar bill giving Baltimore City community associations the power to bring an action in Circuit Court against the owner of a nuisance property. The year after the legislation passed, CLC represented six Baltimore City community associations in a lawsuit brought under the newly enacted statute. A man from Texas had acquired over 200 properties in Baltimore City and was failing to maintain them. The properties were left to deteriorate in nuisance conditions, posing a danger to passersby; damaging adjoining properties; requiring additional support from the City in police, fire, and code enforcement resources; and lowering the value of properties in the surrounding neighborhood. An expert witness report prepared during the litigation found that the presence of a nuisance, vacant property within 1/8 of a mile of a home measurably reduced the value of the home. The six Baltimore City community associations brought an action under the statute involving 57 nuisance properties in their neighborhoods which were owned by this property owner. By the time the case settled in 2015, the nuisance properties had been either demolished, rehabbed, or transferred to a new owner. In addition, the property owner paid a settlement to the community associations, allowing them to support and expand their work for Baltimore neighborhoods and create a citywide effort to address nuisance and vacant properties.

The success of this legislation in Baltimore City demonstrates the effectiveness of this tool for communities to address nuisance issues in their neighborhoods. HB 417 would remove barriers for Baltimore County community associations seeking to bring actions under the statute. It would empower these associations and their residents to fight back against property owners who have allowed their properties to be a blight and a burden on the surrounding neighborhood and on the County as a whole.

CLC supports HB 417. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

For the above reasons,
CLC urges a FAVORABLE VOTE ON HB 417.

Please contact Shana Roth-Gormley, Staff Attorney at Community Law Center, with any questions.
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