



# State of Maryland Commission on Civil Rights

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## **House Bill 0017 - Charter Counties - Comprehensive Plans - Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing POSITION: Support**

Dear Chairperson Korman, Vice Chairperson Boyce, and Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee:

The Maryland Commission on Civil Rights (“MCCR”; “The Commission”) is the State agency responsible for the enforcement of laws prohibiting discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, health services and state contracts based upon race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, marital status, familial status, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, physical and mental disability, and source of income.

House Bill 0017 alters the housing element of a charter county’s comprehensive plan to include requirements for affirmatively furthering fair housing. Affirmatively furthering fair housing means taking meaningful or significant action to combat discrimination and make positive change. The goal is to overcome patterns of segregation and to foster inclusive communities free from barriers that restrict access to housing and opportunity based on protected characteristics.

This can include addressing significant disparities in housing needs and access to opportunity; replacing segregated living patterns with truly integrated and balanced living patterns; transforming racially and ethnically concentrated areas of poverty into areas of opportunity; and fostering and maintaining compliance with civil rights and fair housing laws.

The counties would have a duty to further fair housing through housing and urban development programs, which includes an assessment of fair housing to ensure that the county is affirmatively furthering fair housing. The county can request technical assistance from the Department of Planning and The Department of Housing and Community Development to develop the housing element. This bill does not require any specific action or forbid any specific action by a county to affirmatively further fair housing.

*“Our vision is to have a State that is free from any trace of unlawful discrimination.”*

William Donald Schaefer Tower, 6 Saint Paul Street, Suite 900, Baltimore, Maryland 21202-1631  
Phone: 410-767-8600 · Toll Free: 1-800-637-6247 · Maryland Relay: 711 · Fax: 410-333-1841  
Website: [mccr.maryland.gov](http://mccr.maryland.gov) · E-Mail: [mccr@maryland.gov](mailto:mccr@maryland.gov)

Maryland has a history of discrimination, segregation, and redlining. The impact was devastating, and maps of Baltimore depict what has been dubbed the “Black Butterfly.” A map of the city shows shaded wings starting in central Baltimore that fan out east and west, while the north and south parts of the city remain nearly undisturbed.

The attached map exhibits show statistics for multiple socioeconomic markers in Baltimore. Exhibit A reveals a concentration of vacant and abandoned residential properties within the Black Butterfly. Exhibit B indicates that a majority of the families within the area live far below the poverty line. Exhibit C shows the racial makeup of the city, with a majority of the predominantly African-American neighborhoods falling within the affected areas. Finally, Exhibit D indicates that the Black Butterfly also represents residents with the lowest life expectancy across Baltimore.

Citizens in Maryland still struggle to purchase homes and find units to rent, and homelessness affects over 30,000 individuals. In order to move towards purposeful change to create equity, the counties in Maryland must participate. This bill will help the state fulfill its mandate to support and improve fair housing by requiring localities to contribute to the effort. The only way for the state to successfully achieve fair housing initiatives is to have counties include these policies in their comprehensive plans and then come up with strategies and programs to implement alongside the state.

For these reasons, the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights urges a favorable vote on HB 0017. Thank you for your time and consideration of the information contained in this letter. The Maryland Commission on Civil Rights looks forward to the continued opportunity to work with you to improve and promote civil rights in Maryland.