



MARYLAND LEGAL AID

House Bill 7
In the House Environment and Transportation Committee–
Housing Innovation Pilot Program
Hearing on January 30, 2024
Position: FAVORABLE

Maryland Legal Aid (MLA) submits its written and oral testimony on HB 203 in response to a request from Delegate Vaughn Stewart.

House Bill 7 is legislation that would create housing to break down the stratification between those renters with different income levels and requiring any housing built pursuant to the fund have long term affordability restrictions. Maryland Legal Aid (MLA) supports HB 7.

MLA is a non-profit law firm that provides free legal services to the State’s low-income and vulnerable residents. MLA handles civil legal cases involving a wide range of issues, including representing people and families struggling with housing and eviction.

The human right to housing is one of the most essential and universally recognized human rights. It finds strong recognition in international, federal, and state. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees “the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of [the individual] and of his[/her] family, including food, clothing, shelter and medical care and necessary social services.”¹ One of the basic aspects of the right to housing is that such housing should be affordable.²

By any measure, housing is not affordable for thousands of residents throughout Maryland. The Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development commissioned a study released in December of 2020 that measured housing need in this state. The report noted that, “Despite continued progress, ... Maryland currently lacks approximately 85,000 rental units for its lowest income households (meaning extremely low-income or those earning 30 percent of area median income [AMI (Area Median Income)] or below). In many parts of the state, there aren’t enough rental units for very low-income households (those earning under 50 percent AMI) either. Maryland will add an estimated 97,200 extremely and very low-income households between 2020 and 2030. Without further acceleration to create and preserve deeply affordable units, this shortage will worsen.”³

¹ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, G.A. Res. 217, U.N. GAOR, 3d Sess., pt. 1, U.N. Doc. A/810 (1948).

² General Comment 4, Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, U.N. Doc. E/1992/23, ¶6 (1991).

³ <https://dhcd.maryland.gov/Documents/Other%20Publications/Report.pdf>

The cost to Maryland renters and the state is high. A recent study shows that cost burdened renters spend 57% less on healthcare and 17% less on food. Housing affordability affects the mental health of parents, children's cognitive functioning and adolescent delinquent behavior.⁴

HB 7 is an important affirmative step in increasing the supply of affordable housing to Maryland renters, particularly if the bill grants maximum flexibility to Housing Authorities to establish a one-for-one match of Housing Authority funds to program funds.

By providing opportunity for Housing Authorities to reduce economic stratification by not mandating that the housing serve only those with incomes below 60 percent of AMI, while also requiring that any housing built using the fund have long term affordability restrictions the bill provides an incentive to build communities of opportunity while also building housing that is permanently affordable.

For these reasons MLA urges a favorable report for HB 7.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gregory Countess". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Gregory Countess, Esq.
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⁴ <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/full/10.1146/annurev-soc-090921-040646#:~:text=Evidence%20from%20multiple,Credit>