

February 16, 2024

Dear Chair Feldman and Korman and the honorable members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee and the Environment and Transportation Committee

I am submitting testimony today in opposition of Senate Bill 484 and House Bill 538, also known as the Housing Expansion and Affordability Act of 2024. Although I do not live in the district directly targeted by these bills, their impact will have implications for development in small towns like mine. I believe that if this legislation is passed as introduced, it will diminish the authority of municipal governments presently granted under the Maryland Constitution and by the State Legislature under the Local Government Article and the Land Use Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland.

My position is that this legislation would harm the general welfare of the citizens of the City of Havre de Grace because it would deprive local officials of the authority to manage the maximum density of residential areas when compared with local zoning laws, historic preservation, availability of local business resources to service increased population, environmental impacts, and increased burdens on public facilities. All of these factors must be balanced to provide a healthy, thriving community for our citizens.

I believe that adequate public facilities ordinances serve the public's best interest and allow for managed growth consistent with well-thought-out comprehensive plans. Senate Bill 484 and House Bill 538 would deny the underlying purposes of adequate public facilities laws, which are to ensure that public facilities are present or paid for prior to development. No matter their income levels, all residential communities are entitled to adequate public facilities, and those citizens already burdened with taxes, utility rates, and other fees to support our existing facilities should not bear the burden of unrestrained high-density growth.

Additionally, as written, the bill does not consider the steps local communities have taken to address affordable housing. For example, the City of Havre de Grace's zoning amendments to allow for affordable housing have been recognized as a "best practice" by the Maryland Department of Planning.

Our citizens have come together at council meetings, town halls, and feedback sessions to work together to provide recommendations and suggestions regarding zoning and development based on the needs of our community. We have collaborated over the past two years with our city council, county representatives, the current property owner, hired consultants, and community members. It is my belief that these bills override the hard work of the community members who have been successfully working together across the political spectrum to solve challenges and determine the future of our town based on our unique needs.

I was born and raised in Havre de Grace and my husband and I moved back to our home town to raise a family. We cherish the history, charm, and diversity of our community and we are civically involved because we believe that collaboration and democracy provide a voice to the people as we shape our future. As it stands, Senate Bill 484 and House Bill 538 effectively negate this work and override the interests of our citizens.

I respectfully request the Maryland Senate Education, Energy, and Environment Committee give Senate Bill 484 an unfavorable report and The Maryland House of Delegates Environment and Transportation Committee give House Bill 538 an unfavorable report.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today.

Sincerely,

Brittany Powell