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## Testimony: Montgomery Countryside Alliance Position Favorable Without Amendment HB 1364 March 21, 2024

Dear Members of the House Environment & Transportation Committee,

For the record our position is favorable without amendment to HB 1364:

<https://www.mocoalliance.org/news/we-need-an-office-of-the-peoples-counsel>

Reads in part:

The perils of weakening the OPC are detailed in a [memo from 2017 from then County Executive Ike Leggett to the Council](#) which reads in part

"When I was on the Council, I initially proposed a fully functioning Office of People's Counsel. As originally drafted, the office was intended to function as a legal resource, employing an experienced attorney who would represent residents in land use proceedings to promote full and fair presentation of issues and to assure sound land use decisions"

### OPC as Tool to Block Affordable Housing?

The Coalition for Smarter Growth (CSG) has sent an action alert alleging that "The People's Counsel was used in the past to obstruct affordable housing production" and thus should not be reinstated. The alert does not give examples, MCA has reached out to CSG to understand these claims, and we have not yet gotten a response. Our message:

*Can you provide instances where the MC OPC was used to block affordable housing as is asserted?*

*Our perspective is strikingly different. In the absence of an OPC, MCA has been fielding requests, countywide, for assistance by communities. None of these requests have been aimed at blocking affordable housing. Some recent examples:*

*Communities seeking guidance to address airport expansion, significant deforestation, conditional use application for large scale commercial development in sensitive watershed in area of small affordable houses served by groundwater wells, county airport's continued use of leaded fuels, a historic freeman community dealing with illegal operation of commercial business...*

*An OPC would be far better placed to provide the legal guidance in these instances.*

*And, to be clear, we cannot recall past instances where this resource was engaged to block affordable housing. So we seek your clarification regarding the assertions made in your action alert.*



No response has been received to date to our inquiry above.

Baltimore County, Harford, Howard, and Prince George's all benefit from a People's Counsel. Residents in Maryland's largest jurisdiction deserve one too.

Respectfully,

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Taylor".

Caroline Taylor  
Executive Director