



House Bill 549

Statute of Limitations – Prosecution or Enforcement of Local Consumer Protection Codes

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Judicial Proceedings Committee

Date: March 21, 2024

From: Sarah Sample

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 549. This bill establishes a timeline of three years for a local jurisdiction to file a claim against an entity in violation of a local consumer protection code. This timeline begins at the time the offense was committed.

Protecting residents from predatory companies, who take advantage of consumers in need of services, is necessary to ensure communities have access to goods and services without fear of being exploited. Counties are currently authorized, in conjunction with the Attorney General's Office, to carry out various means of protection for distressed consumers in their jurisdictions. Specifically, local governments can enact local consumer protection codes and establish enforcement divisions within the county government to address claims from residents.

The provisions of this bill enable these local enforcement divisions with a longer window to effectively investigate claims as well as assign penalties and fines to entities in violation of local codes. There can be a great deal of research and discovery required to resolve these types of issues on behalf of residents who, often, have been the victim of systemic industry abuse and neglect. This is an authority and responsibility that local jurisdictions appreciate and do not take lightly. A longer window will undoubtedly enable counties to resolve these issues – especially more complicated matters – with even greater integrity as they defend the interests of community members.

As additional counties elect to handle these claims locally, the three-year window will ensure they have the necessary time to complete a thorough investigation and assign appropriate penalties on behalf of residents. For these reasons, MACo urges a **FAVORABLE** report for HB 549.