



Odette Ramos

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Testimony

**HB777 – Baltimore City – Unpaid Water and Sewer Charges- Tax Sales of Non-Owner-Occupied Properties
OPPOSE
February 20, 2024**

Honorable Chair Atterbeary and Distinguished Members of the House Ways and Means Committee:

I am writing to oppose **HB777 Baltimore City – Unpaid Water and Sewer Charges- Tax Sales of Non-Owner-Occupied Properties**. This bill would only be acceptable if the attached amendments are included to make this just applicable for vacant and abandoned properties.

In 2019, the General Assembly passed SB0096 to remove water bills from tax sale for Baltimore City residential properties, including homeowners, heirs, and rental properties. The language says that if the only bill is the water bill, the home will not be entered into tax sale.

HB777 adds back into tax sale the water bills for non-owner-occupied properties. Our amendments make it clearer that the water bills will be added to the liens for vacant and abandoned properties only. While this already occurs because generally there are taxes in addition to water bills that are owed, the amendments would make it clear that vacant and abandoned properties can go to tax sale, or be eligible for In Rem, with the water bills included in the liens. The amendment language for the definition of vacant property is consistent throughout state code.

Without the amendment, HB777 would hurt renters and heirs. Non-owner-occupied properties include rental properties and heirs properties. Often, when a family moves into a property that a relative has owned and they passed, the home is not listed as owner-occupied until that family gets their name on the deed and they apply for the Homestead Tax Credit. In some neighborhoods in our city, up to 20% of the non-owner-occupied homes are in this situation. These are families that would like to experience intergenerational wealth and should not be foreclosed upon. In addition, renters could be evicted from a home that has been foreclosed upon because of tax sale.

This bill comes from the tax sale purchasers themselves. One has to question their motives for asking for this bill. They want to make additional money from collecting on the liens they have purchased. They say they want to provide more money for the City's coffers, but Baltimore City is in the midst of complete tax sale reform. Our reform efforts include everyone, and not just homeowners.

Please vote unfavorable for this bill if the attached amendments are not added.

Respectfully Submitted:

Odette Ramos
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