



Neighborhood Housing Services of Baltimore, Inc.

February 15, 2022

Delegate Vanessa E. Atterbeary, Chair
House Office Building
Room 131
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: HB 777

Honorable Chair Atterbeary and Members of the Committee:

I am the Chief Executive Officer of Neighborhood Housing Services of Baltimore (NHS), and a resident of Baltimore City. Our organization believes that economic and social justice are a right for all residents and communities. We promote this belief by removing barriers of access to homeownership, helping resident access resources to maintain their homes, and supporting communities historically impacted by systemic disinvestment. I also had the privilege of serving as co-chair of the Baltimore City Tax Sale Task Force appointed by Mayor Scott.

HB777 proposes to include water bills for non-owner-occupied properties in tax sale in Baltimore City. Included in this group are legacy family properties that have not been transfer from deceased family members, landlords both small and large, unoccupied properties in various states of repair, and vacant building notice properties. When I was appointed co-chair of the tax sale work group, Mayor Scott charged us with creating an equitable tax sale system. This involves helping return vacant and blighted properties to productive use and protecting residents of Baltimore City. HB777 impacts many properties beyond just vacant homes. With the goal of protecting residents and moving vacant properties to productive use it is important to amend the bill. I have attached an amendment that has been proposed to the bill sponsors for consideration. The amendment will limit the inclusion of water bills to only properties that meet the state definition to be eligible for *in rem* tax sale. This accomplishes the goal of moving vacant and abandoned properties to productive use without hurting residents of Baltimore City. With the amendment I am supportive of the bill. If the amendment is not adopted I strongly oppose the legislation as drafted due to the impact on vulnerable residents of Baltimore.

We ask that the committee provide an *unfavorable* report. Alternatively we would support adoption of an amendment limiting water bills to vacant properties.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daniel T. Ellis".

Daniel T. Ellis
Executive Director



25 E. 20th Street, Suite 170 Baltimore, Maryland 21218
Office: 410-327-1200
Fax: 410-675-1855

www.nhsbaltimore.org