

**Written Testimony (FAVORABLE) for HB0489
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HB0489 stems from a few architects and housing experts with perspective from abroad realizing that requiring two stairwells for any building above three stories, as we do in the US, is rare, extremely onerous, doesn't help with fire safety as much as one might think, and profoundly bloats the form of newly-constructed buildings. This bill takes steps to raise the story limit for single-stair buildings from 3 stories to 6 stories, bringing Maryland in line with international best practice.

Single-stair buildings offer better natural light, natural ventilation, and are more suited for family-sized units than conventional apartment buildings with two stairs and a long hallway.

Single-stair buildings are slim and make urban infill possible, especially on small lots. This bill will transform countless infill lots across the state from undevelopable to developable.

Single-stair buildings allow for small and mid-sized developments that add density to communities in a gentle, gradual manner. This means a lower-risk investment that is more approachable to local, small-scale developers.

Single-stair buildings in excess of six stories are the norm in wealthy, developed nations -- the US and Canada are exceptions. If the US can't do this safely, no one can.

Six-story single-stair buildings have legal precedent in Seattle, WA, where they've been legal and abundant since the 1970s.

Single-stair buildings already exist in Maryland, mostly in the form of renovated rowhouse apartments, garden apartment complexes, and apartments built before the double-egress rule -- like the Mount Vernon apartment building where I currently live, on the 8th floor. What's key to understand is that this bill puts in motion a formal, data-driven, expert-led process to safely increase the height limit of the single-stair building type from 3 stories to 6, with enhanced fire safety measures.

In comparison to double-loaded corridor multifamily buildings, single-stair buildings have many fewer units/residents per stairwell, and have much shorter travel distances from front door to stairwell.

The safest buildings are new buildings, which are required to have sprinklers. If six-story single-stair buildings are legalized, there will be more new, safe, sprinklered buildings (not to mention in central, urban locations).

I am in favor of HB0489 because it fixes a tiny detail in our building code that has been holding back untold growth and development potential. Maryland -- let's join the growing ranks of states and jurisdictions who have taken on single-stair reform, and fix it.