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SB 436

February 20, 2025

TO: Members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

FROM: Nina Themelis, Director of Mayor's Office of Government Relations

RE: Senate Bill 436 – Maryland Department of Labor - Study on Building Code Requirements for Single-Staircase Buildings

POSITION: Support

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** Senate Bill (SB) 436.

SB 436 would require the Maryland Department of Labor to study building code requirements for single-staircase buildings in the State and other States and analyze best practices when drafting building code requirements. The bill would require the Department to make legislative and regulatory recommendations for the purpose of increasing the affordable housing supply by reducing barriers to multifamily housing development and require the Department to report to the Governor and certain committees of the General Assembly by December 1, 2025.

The BCA supports SB 436 as there is ongoing discussion between the Administration, City Council members and impacted agencies, regarding the feasibility of enacting local provisions that would allow a single exit stairway in certain multifamily residential buildings up to a certain height. There is great interest in the subject of regulation related to “Single-Staircase Buildings” in Baltimore City tied to the preservation and adaptive re-use of historic buildings and the affordability of new multi-family construction.

A State Study regarding potential legislative or regulatory changes to authorize the construction of single–staircase buildings up to six stories above grade plane would be useful in guiding the City as we consider additional options to encourage the development of affordable housing.

Every three years, Baltimore City is required to update its Building Fire and Related Codes pursuant to the directive of the General Assembly by and through the Maryland Department of Labor (DLR). Any amendments to the Maryland Building Performance Standards or recommendations from the State Study could be easily incorporated into our next local BFRC update. Using Study recommendations as a basis, we may mandate additional requirements to augment for increases in height, number of stories, and types of construction allowances.

It is important to look at best practices from across the country with similar building stock and it is beneficial to have State wide guidance for local jurisdictions to refer to for both safety and consistency. SB 436 may help to empower local jurisdictions to reduce barriers to multifamily housing development and increase the affordable housing supply.

For these reasons, the BCA respectfully request a **favorable** report on SB 436.