

Honorable Members of the House Committee,

Our names are Dhruv Dobariya and Sidaarth Karegowdra, we are sophomores from River Hill High School, and we are proud to testify today on behalf of Illuminate Maryland, a student-led advocacy organization dedicated to equity, accessibility, and community well-being. We work to ensure that all Marylanders—especially youth—have a voice in shaping policies that affect their daily lives. Today, we urge you to support HB0360, which seeks to direct revenue from annual community association management registration fees toward funding alternative dispute resolution (ADR) services for disputes between community associations and homeowners, a crucial step toward ensuring fairness, efficiency, and harmony in our communities.

As young members of this state, we have witnessed firsthand the tensions that can arise between homeowners and their community associations. Many of our friends' families, and even our own, have struggled with disputes over issues such as maintenance responsibilities, use of shared spaces, and enforcement of association rules. Unfortunately, the current avenues for resolving these conflicts are often costly, time-consuming, and, at times, inaccessible to those without legal expertise. This bill presents a much-needed solution.

From personal experience, we recall a neighbor's family that faced excessive fines from their homeowners' association (HOA) due to minor infractions regarding exterior home modifications. They attempted to contest these charges, but the only recourse available to them involved expensive legal proceedings that were financially unfeasible. Had a structured, county-supported ADR mechanism been available, they could have resolved their dispute fairly and efficiently without undue financial burden.

Additionally, we have seen how the lack of accessible mediation services leads to community divisions. An unresolved conflict between an association and homeowners can create long-term animosity, reducing the overall quality of life in a neighborhood. Through ADR services funded by existing registration fees, HB0360 ensures that homeowners and community associations have a structured, impartial, and cost-effective means of resolving disagreements. This not only benefits the individuals involved but also strengthens our communities as a whole.

The passage of this bill would set a precedent for fostering cooperation and trust between community associations and residents. Instead of disputes escalating into costly legal battles or ongoing hostilities, ADR provides a means for open dialogue, compromise, and equitable resolutions. The funding mechanism proposed is also reasonable, ensuring that no additional financial burden is placed on the county or taxpayers.

For these reasons, we strongly urge the committee to support and pass HB0360. By doing so, you will provide Prince George's County with a practical and effective means of resolving community disputes, fostering better relationships between associations and homeowners, and promoting a better living environment for all residents.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sidaarth Karegowdra | Dhruv Dobariya

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