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**HB1239**

February 28, 2025

**TO:** Members of the House Environment & Transportation Committee

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

**RE:** House Bill 1239 – Fair Housing and Housing Discrimination - Regulations, Intent, and Discriminatory Effect

**POSITION: Support**

Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill (HB) 1239 – Fair Housing and Housing Discrimination - Regulations, Intent, and Discriminatory Effect.

HB 1239 alters Article – State Government, §20-101 of the Annotated Code of Maryland to provide for additional protections of residents against housing discrimination, meaningfully bolstering the Department of Housing and Community Development's (DHCD) fair housing efforts. Under the language of the legislation, housing discrimination would not only constitute discriminatory practices, but any act that has a discriminatory impact regardless of intent. The bill also expands DHCD's role in clarifying and enforcing fair housing regulations.

According to the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights' (MCCR) annual reports from 2021-2024, MCCR received 2,215 complaints of housing discrimination in those four years. Of those complaints, the overwhelming majority were based on disability. Also of those complaints, MCCR investigated 693 cases - with the number of cases doubling from 2022 to 2024. HB 1239 would allow for an additional avenue for affected residents to prove their complaints of housing discrimination, and by doing so, bolster MCCR and DHCD's work in deterring future housing discrimination while improving access to housing for the members of Maryland's communities who are most at-risk for housing insecurity. Traditionally, fair housing complainants need to prove the *intent* of the act which results in inequitable outcomes in the acquisition, maintenance, or loss of housing; instead, HB 1239 would lower the burden of proof to that of disparate *impact* on an individual of a protected class. From this, it can be reasonably assumed that housing providers will take extra care to ensure they are not discriminating against prospective renters and buyers, either intentionally or unintentionally. This is particularly important to Baltimore City as, according to MCCR's reports, 152 (21.9%) of housing discrimination cases originated from Baltimore City.

For the above stated reasons, the BCA respectfully requests a **favorable** report on House Bill 1239.