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Committee: Environment and Transportation

Testimony on: HB 503, Land Use – Regional Housing Infrastructure Gap (Housing for Jobs Act)

Position: Support

Hearing Date: March 4, 2025

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club supports HB 503. The Housing for Jobs Act would create certain requirements for localities to achieve a jobs-to-housing ratio of less than 1.5. Localities would be obliged to approve development applications with new housing units unless there is a reason for denial that outweighs the need for housing. We are glad to see that localities are permitted to deny projects proposed in conservation areas or on agricultural land and encouraged to approve projects near rail stations.

Housing is too expensive almost everywhere across the state and is especially too expensive in places that are highly desirable due to their access to jobs and amenities. As Sierra Club's Urban Infill Guidance states, how we build cities and towns has a profound effect on the causes and impacts of climate change.¹ An essential strategy for reducing greenhouse gas emissions is supporting housing growth near job centers. When someone lives close to where they work, they have a shorter commute and are also more likely to use sustainable transportation options, such as public transit, biking, or walking.

To address this goal, we believe in transit-oriented development to help boost transit ridership and in creating inclusive communities to promote a more sustainable, fair future. Because of this, we support the provision in HB 503 that would enable an affordable home or a home within three-quarters of a mile of a rail station to count as 1.5 homes towards the local housing infrastructure gap. This will encourage localities to move forward projects near rail stations and those with homes that are affordable to moderate-income households.

Climate change, housing, land use, affordability, equity, economic development, and transportation are all inextricably entwined. Legislation like this is the right path forward to meet the state's goals on all of these important issues in alignment with voters' concerns. Nearly a quarter of voters believe housing affordability is the biggest problem facing the state, according to a January 2025 poll conducted by the Washington Post and the University of Maryland.² As such, it is time for the state to take bold action and try new strategies. Therefore, we urge you to submit a favorite report for HB 503.

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¹ https://www.sierraclub.org/sites/www.sierraclub.org/files/Infill%20Policy_5.18.2019.pdf

² <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2025/01/31/maryland-poll-moore-budget-proposals/>

Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America's oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.