
**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT WITH DEPARTMENTAL
AMENDMENTS OF HOUSE BILL 716**
**Housing and Community Development - Statewide Rental Assistance Voucher
Program Eligibility - Alterations**
Environment and Transportation Committee
February 18, 2025

Social Work Advocates for Social Change supports HB 716 with DHCD amendments. The bill seeks to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Statewide Rental Assistance and Voucher Program – particularly in areas of the State without a local Federal Housing Choice Voucher Program administrator.

We are grateful to DHCD for hearing our concerns and the concerns of other advocates, and for offering the following amendments, which we strongly support:

Article – Housing and Community Development

4-2908.

(b) A family assisted under the State Program shall be expected to pay not more than ~~{30%}~~40% of its monthly adjusted gross income for rent and utilities, as determined by [the Department or] the public housing agency AT THE TIME THE FAMILY INITIALLY RECEIVES ASSISTANCE UNDER THE STATE PROGRAM EXCEPT AS OTHERWISE PROVIDED FOR BY REGULATIONS GOVERNING THE FEDERAL HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAM.

These amendments will ensure both that DHCD has the flexibility to administer Maryland’s Statewide Rental Assistance Voucher Program, and that 30% of monthly adjusted gross income remains the standard of housing affordability for low-income households.

At a time when housing is out of reach for many Marylanders, it is critically important that we promote policies that increase access to affordable housing. Maryland is the 9th least affordable state for housing.¹ It is estimated that a \$36.70 hourly household wage is required to afford a 2-bedroom apartment at Fair Market Rent (FMR) in Maryland. At Maryland’s minimum wage of \$15/hr, this would require someone working the equivalent of nearly two-and-a-half full-time jobs for rent to be considered affordable. For those receiving \$967 per month in Federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) disability income or \$373/mo from Maryland’s Temporary Disability Assistance Program (TDAP), even an

¹ Out of Reach: The high cost of housing. (2024). National Low Income Housing Coalition. (rep.) https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/2024_00R-MiniBook_1.pdf

efficiency unit at the FMR (\$1,492/month) is far out of reach.² Many renters are substantially burdened by housing costs - with 73% of extremely low-income renter households facing severe cost burden.³

While the crisis of housing affordability is especially severe in Maryland's urban centers, rural Marylanders, too, require action to close the gap between household incomes and housing costs. In *only* Alleghany County can a full-time minimum wage worker afford an efficiency unit at FMR (\$624) - and then, only barely; for many older adults and people with disabilities who live on fixed incomes, however, even this remains unaffordable. In every other county, the "housing wage" for a zero-bedroom unit is higher than Maryland's minimum wage.⁴

It is critically important for the Statewide Rental Assistance Voucher Program to be effective - and to maintain the long-established federal standard of housing affordability for low-income households. **Social Work Advocates for Social Change urges a favorable report with the Departmental Amendments on HB 716.**

Social Work Advocates for Social Change is a coalition of MSW students at the University of Maryland School of Social Work that seeks to promote equity and justice through public policy, and to engage the communities impacted by public policy in the policymaking process.

² Ibid.

³ "Maryland." *National Low Income Housing Coalition*, nlihc.org/housing-needs-by-state/maryland. Accessed 11 Feb. 2025.

⁴ Out of Reach: The high cost of housing. (2024). National Low Income Housing Coalition. (rep.) https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/2024_OOR-MiniBook_1.pdf