

Baltimore City Sheriff's Office

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TO: The Honorable Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Nicholas T.R. Blendy, Esq., Assistant Sheriff, Baltimore City Sheriff's Office

RE: Senate Bill 989 – Real Property – Unauthorized Occupants – Sheriff's Property Registry and Removal

DATE: February 25, 2025

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Sheriff's Office (BCSO) **supports** Senate Bill (SB) 989.

SB 989 is enabling legislation that authorizes the Sheriff of a county to create an Unauthorized Occupant Registry for real property located within their jurisdiction, and to allow property owners to voluntarily pay a reasonable fee to register their property with the Sheriff's registry. The legislation includes language intended to provide safeguards to both property owners and individuals who might find themselves on the premises of a property located on such a registry.

The goal of the bill appears to be responsive to the anecdotal uptick in real property "squatting" cases in the State of Maryland, as has been brought to the attention of the General Assembly through several different legislative vehicles this legislative session. The BCSO finds the approach offered in SB 989 as particularly important—not just because it provides it a new authority to operate a registry, if it were to choose to do so, if the bill were enacted—but also because it authorizes a proactive approach to attempting to reduce the number of "squatting" cases by what the BCSO envisions to be a robust public education and fraud deterrence combination.

The BCSO does acknowledge that the area of law that SB 989 appears to have most in common is the "wrongful detainer" action in Landlord Tenant court, and there is much to consider in determining how SB 989 best provides a compatible tool to that process. But overall, the BCSO believes the proactive approach of this legislation in attempting to use education and deterrence while creating no new crimes or increases in punitive criminal sentences makes this bill a very unique and commendable approach to solving a very real problem.

For the foregoing reasons, the BCSO respectfully requests a **favorable** report on SB 989.