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Judicial Proceedings Committee
Maryland State Senate
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership Support for SB 514 Landlord and Tenant
- Residential Leases - Prospective Tenant Criminal History Records Check
(Maryland Fair Chance Housing Act)**

Dear Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher and Honorable Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

On behalf of the Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership (BRHP), I'm writing to express our support for SB 514.

BRHP is a non-profit organization that expands housing choices for low-income families who have historically been excluded from housing in well-resourced neighborhoods by helping them access and transition successfully to safe, healthy, and economically vibrant communities. As the Regional Administrator for the Baltimore Housing Mobility Program, BRHP currently provides over 4,300 low-income families rental assistance in the form of Housing Choice Vouchers coupled with counseling support for families as they move from areas of concentrated poverty to areas of opportunity in Baltimore City and the five surrounding counties.

SB 514 is a critical step toward ensuring fair housing opportunities for individuals with criminal records by:

- Prohibiting landlords from requesting or inquiring about a prospective tenant's criminal history before extending a conditional offer (with the exception that a landlord may require information regarding whether a prospective tenant is subject to a lifetime state sex offender registration requirement or has been convicted of manufacturing methamphetamine on the premises of federally assisted housing).
- Prohibiting landlords from requiring drug or alcohol tests or seeking information about rehabilitation history.

- Prohibiting landlords from denying applicants based on arrests that did not result in a conviction or on expunged or otherwise nullified convictions.
- Limiting the types of criminal convictions that may be grounds for withdrawal of a conditional housing offer to only the most serious offenses.
- Requiring landlords to disclose their criminal background screening process before accepting an application fee.
- Establishing a process for appealing a withdrawal of an offer based on criminal history, and allowing prospective tenants to present evidence of inaccuracies or mitigating factors in their criminal history.

Safe and stable housing provides the foundation necessary for securing employment, pursuing education, and successfully integrating into society. Currently, individuals with criminal records often face significant and unnecessary barriers to securing safe and stable housing, putting their ability to be successful following incarceration at serious risk. These barriers disproportionately impact Black and low-income individuals, further exacerbating systemic inequities.

SB 514 helps reduce these barriers by ensuring that prospective tenants are not unfairly denied housing due to their criminal history when they otherwise qualify. At the same time, the bill maintains important safeguards for landlords and other tenants by allowing restrictions for the most serious offenses. A true "second chance" requires access to stable housing, and this legislation ensures that Marylanders with criminal histories have that opportunity.

Additionally, SB 514 promotes transparency by requiring landlords to clearly outline their criminal background screening process and provide applicants with a means to challenge unfair or inaccurate denials. This is essential in combating systemic discrimination and ensuring that individuals who have served their time are not permanently excluded from securing a home.

Research has shown that formerly incarcerated individuals who obtain stable housing are more likely to reintegrate successfully into their communities and less likely to return to prison (<https://www.vox.com/policy/23750632/housing-landlords-renter-fair-chance-criminal-record-background-check>). Housing stability is a key factor in reducing recidivism and promoting long-term success for returning citizens.

For these reasons, BRHP strongly urges a favorable report on SB 514. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Adria Crutchfield
Executive Director