



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 1299

TO: Chair Valderrama and Members of the House Economic Matters Committee

FROM: Zachary Alberts, Director of Advocacy and Strategic Initiatives at the Center for Urban Families

DATE: March 4th, 2026

Good afternoon, my name is Zachary Alberts. I am the Director of Advocacy and Strategic Initiatives at the Center for Urban Families, a West Baltimore based workforce and family strengthening organization.

At CFUF, we operate a workforce development program focused on building the skills for un- and underemployed Baltimoreans in order to connect them to the workforce. Owning a home is one of the most common long-term motivators and goals our members have. Through years of hard work, budgeting, and sacrifice many of our members have been able to do so.

A 2022 analysis by the non-partisan Economic Policy Institute concludes that even “controlling for racial differences in education, experience, and the fact that black workers are more likely to live in lower-wage Southern states leaves an unexplained [wage] gap of 14.9%.” Put another way, that means the average black worker would have to work 15% more hours a week to afford the same house as the average white worker.

A 2025 report by the Abell Foundation found that houses in predominantly black Baltimore neighborhoods are almost twice as likely to be appraised below the sales price as those in predominantly white Baltimore neighborhoods. This means many of the members we serve must overcome systemic underinvestment in their education, the negative employment effects of mass incarceration, the systemic racism plaguing the hiring process, having to work extra hours to afford the same home as their white coworkers, only to purchase an asset whose value is likely to be eroded by even *more* systemic racism.

And the problem compounds. Each low appraisal becomes a comparable for the next one. It does not just hurt the individual homeowner; it suppresses the value of the entire neighborhood over time, with direct consequences for what families can borrow, refinance, and leave behind. Small wonder the wealth of the median white household is 9x higher than the median black household.

HB 1299 creates an early warning and a formal opportunity for interested parties to submit additional comparable sales data before an appraisal is finalized. It requires the appraiser to document what was submitted and explain why it did or did not affect the outcome.

The people we serve work hard to get to homeownership. This bill helps ensure that when they get there, the system does not quietly work against them. We urge a favorable report.