



Testimony in Support WITH AMENDMENTS House Bill 239 - Land Use - Zoning - Limitations (Starter and Silver Homes Act of 2026)

February 10, 2026

To Chair Valderrama and Members of the Committee

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in **SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS for HB239** on behalf of ShoreRivers. ShoreRivers is a river protection organization on Maryland's Eastern Shore with more than 2,000 members. Our mission is to protect Maryland's Eastern Shore waterways through science-based advocacy, restoration, education, and engagement.

ShoreRivers commends the intent of this bill to increase affordable housing across the State of Maryland, however we feel the current language in the bill, when applied broadly across all counties, will have more significant consequences for rural Eastern Shore counties and the sensitive landscape features found here. We stand with Arundel Rivers Federation, Chesapeake Legal Alliance, Waterkeepers Chesapeake, and other environmental partners in asking for the following amendments:

Clarify that lands within the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bay Critical Areas, forested lands suitable for forest interior dwelling species, and areas that are not currently connected to public water and sewer are EXEMPT. This amendment ensures that our most sensitive areas, such as the Critical Area, the largest forests with prescribed protections in the Forest Conservation Act (typically greater than 50 or even 100 acres in size), and areas outside of current public water and sewer service will not be unintentionally targeted for development as a result of this bill.

Strike impervious surface lot coverage language. This amendment strikes the bill's prohibition on counties setting maximum lot coverage limits. These coverage limits have always formed a key component of land use regulations that limits the proliferation of impervious surfaces, thus limiting land disturbance and pollution.

Finally, the Starter and Silver Homes Act limits and pre-empts local planning and previous public engagement regardless of existing jurisdictional or county zoning. This bill will upzone all land within existing and planned water and sewer areas, including **agricultural**, low density zoned lands, and or targeted conservation properties. On the Eastern Shore, this could result in sprawl instead of increasing density in targeted growth areas. **We therefore ask that all agricultural properties be exempt.**

Thank you for your consideration on this matter. ShoreRivers urges a favorable report with amendments.

Sincerely,

Annie Richards, Chester Riverkeeper on behalf of:

ShoreRivers

Scott Budden, Executive Director

Annie Richards, Chester Riverkeeper | Matt Pluta, Choptank Riverkeeper
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