COMPTROLLER of MARYLAND
SERVING THE PEOPLE

Brooke E. Lierman
Comptroller

Stephen Harrington
Head of Government Affairs

Letter of Support
HB239 – Starter and Silver Homes Act of 2026
Economic Matters Committee – February 12, 2026

Chair Valderrama, Vice Chair Lorig and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this letter in support of House Bill 239, the Starter and Silver Homes Act of 2026.

What this bill does

HB 239 places reasonable statewide limits on certain local zoning practices that have restricted housing supply in single-family neighborhoods. The bill prohibits jurisdictions from using minimum lot sizes, excessive setback rules, or restrictive design standards to block the construction of smaller single-family homes and townhouses. It allows property owners in qualifying single-family zones to subdivide lots into up to three parcels under defined conditions. The bill preserves local authority over building safety, fire codes, environmental protections, and pre-existing historic districts, ensuring that community protections remain intact while unlocking additional housing capacity.

Why this is important

The Office of the Comptroller's report, *Housing & The Economy,* found that Maryland's affordability crisis is driven less by a shortage of land and more by zoning rules that suppress effective supply in high-demand communities. Persistently low vacancy rates raise rents and home prices even when construction is occurring elsewhere. By allowing more modestly sized homes within existing neighborhoods, HB 239 increases functional housing supply where demand is strongest, making better use of land and infrastructure that taxpayers have already funded.

Our research shows that zoning barriers, rather than a lack of developable land, are a central driver of artificially low vacancy rates. Minimum lot sizes, rigid setbacks, and design mandates shrink what can legally be built, constraining supply even in places with strong demand for housing. HB 239 directly addresses this mismatch by standardizing basic zoning allowances while still respecting local health, safety, and preservation interests.

From a fiscal perspective, enabling more "starter" and "silver" homes strengthens Maryland's tax base by expanding homeownership opportunities and supporting stable population growth in job-rich communities. It also reduces pressure for outward sprawl, which is more costly for state and local governments to serve with roads, schools, and utilities.

The bill also advances equity. Younger families, first-time buyers, and older Marylanders seeking to downsize are disproportionately harmed by zoning that permits only large, expensive homes.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report on House Bill 239. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Stephen Harrington at sharrington@marylandtaxes.gov

My Best,

Brooke E. Lierman
Comptroller of Maryland