House Bill 239

Land Use – Zoning – Limitations (Starter and Silver Homes Act)

Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Economic Matters Committee

Date: February 10, 2026

From: County Commissioners of Worcester County

The County Commissioners of Worcester County appreciate the Administration's focus on increasing housing options and addressing affordability challenges across Maryland. We share the goal of ensuring that communities have access to appropriately sized and priced housing and recognize that zoning reform can help meet that goal.

That said, as drafted, House Bill 239 raises concerns for rural jurisdictions like Worcester County, where land use patterns, infrastructure capacity, and long-standing agricultural preservation efforts differ significantly from more urbanized areas. The bill's uniform standards for lot sizes and setbacks may unintentionally limit local governments' ability to address roadway safety, future transportation needs, and site-specific conditions that are critical in rural communities.

Additionally, the requirement to permit townhouses in all areas allowing single-family residential uses warrants further consideration in agriculturally zoned areas. Worcester County's agricultural and conservation lands reflect decades of state and local investment and private stewardship, and careful planning has been central to balancing housing needs with farmland preservation and environmental protection.

According to the Department of Housing and Community Development's Housing Production Targets Report, Worcester County is currently meeting its projected housing needs over the next five years based on permits issued. Given this context, we respectfully suggest that additional flexibility or exemptions for rural jurisdictions would better align the bill's goals with local conditions while still advancing broader housing priorities.

For these reasons, Worcester County must oppose the bill as written, as its one-size-fits-all approach to the state's housing crisis stands to have a negative impact on our carefully developed local land use policies and our quality of life.