

Testimony in Opposition to HB 239

House Bill 239 – Starter and Silver Homes Act of 2026

House Economic Matters Committee

Position: Unfavorable

Chair Valderrama and Members of the Committee,

I am Ron Weiss and I live in Fort Washington. I am the President of the Indian Head Highway Area Action Council, Inc. (IHHAAC).

I respectfully submit testimony **in opposition to House Bill 239**, the Starter and Silver Homes Act of 2026. While expanding housing opportunity is an important policy goal, HB 239 relies on broad, by-right preemption of local zoning standards in sewered single-family areas without requiring any demonstration that transportation capacity, public services, or job access are adequate to support the additional growth it enables.

HB 239's Mechanism Creates Economic Risk

HB 239 does not target areas with demonstrated infrastructure capacity or strong job access. Instead, it applies uniformly to areas already zoned for single-family residential use that are connected, or planned to be connected, to public water and sewer. Within those areas, the bill:

- Caps minimum lot sizes at 5,000 square feet.
- Prohibits minimum home size, most dimensional controls, and architectural standards.
- Requires that town houses be permitted as a single-family housing type.
- Allows subdivision of an improved lot into up to three lots, subject to limited constraints.

These provisions operate **by right**. They do not require a finding of transportation readiness, school capacity, public safety staffing, or proximity to employment centers. As a result, HB 239 increases housing capacity in locations where additional growth can degrade, rather than strengthen, economic performance.

Economic Matters Implications Are Direct and Substantial

Housing policy is economic policy. Where housing growth outpaces infrastructure and job access, the predictable outcomes are longer commutes, higher household transportation costs, reduced labor market efficiency, and weaker returns on public investment.

This risk is especially acute in corridors such as **MD 210 in Prince George's and Charles Counties**, where State and County planning documents already identify transportation reliability and workforce mobility as prerequisites for economic growth. MD 210 already carries heavy daily

traffic volumes, serves as the primary access route for critical federal and defense facilities, and lacks near-term high-capacity transit alternatives. Schools and public safety resources in the corridor are already under strain.

By enabling incremental residential densification in these areas without any requirement to align growth with job creation or transportation improvements, HB 239 risks deepening congestion and shrinking effective labor sheds for employers. That outcome undermines, rather than advances, Maryland's economic competitiveness.

State Preemption Without State Accountability

HB 239 significantly limits local authority over lot size, setbacks, design standards, and housing type, yet it does not pair that preemption with State responsibility for the downstream impacts. The bill does not:

- Require the State to fund transportation or school capacity triggered by new housing.
- Condition applicability on proximity to employment centers or transit.
- Provide performance thresholds or corrective mechanisms if conditions deteriorate.

Local governments retain responsibility for managing the consequences, but lose key tools to shape development in a way that protects economic function and quality of life.

Affordability Is Not Assured

Although HB 239 is framed as an affordability measure, the bill does not require affordability outcomes. Smaller lots and reduced standards do not guarantee lower prices, particularly in high-demand corridors where land values and infrastructure constraints dominate costs. The likely result in many areas is increased land speculation and incremental density without meaningful affordability gains.

Conclusion

HB 239 adopts a one-size-fits-all zoning preemption approach that fails to account for economic geography, infrastructure readiness, or workforce access. In strategic corridors and infrastructure-constrained communities, the bill risks worsening congestion, increasing household transportation costs, and weakening Maryland's economic development efforts.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue an **unfavorable report on HB 239**.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.