



HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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February 23, 2026

The Honorable Kriselda Valderrama, Chair
Economic Matters Committee
230 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT of House Bill 778:** Land Use – Middle Housing Options - Requirements

Dear Chair Valderrama, Vice Chair Charkoudian, and Members of the Committee:

I write to express our support for HB778, Land Use-Middle Housing Options-Requirements. We are proud of the nationally recognized community we have built in Howard County, one defined by opportunity, connection, and a high quality of life. Protecting that legacy while expanding access to housing is one of the most important challenges we face. It calls for a united effort, practical solutions, deliberate intention, and an unwavering commitment to equity.

Right now, the gap between housing demand and availability is putting pressure on Maryland counties. Change and growth are necessary, but must be shaped sustainability, equitability and responsibly. This legislation helps strike that balance by expanding opportunities for smaller, more attainable housing options while respecting the integrity of existing neighborhoods. It gives local communities practical tools to respond without losing sight of who we are.

HB778 supports the transformational work that we have identified and begun with the implementation of our National Association of Counties (NACo) award-winning General Plan, HoCo By Design including:

- The recent passage of impactful accessory dwelling unit (ADU) legislation allowing both attached and detached accessory dwelling units by right in numerous residential zoning districts.
- The establishment of the Affordable Housing Working Group (AHWG) to assess and make recommendations for targeted incentive programs for affordable and accessible housing.
- Developed a policy to implement HB538 of 2024, the Housing Expansion and Affordability Act, which allows for the construction of modular housing in residential zoning districts and incentives for the construction of affordable housing within 0.75 miles of a passenger rail station.
- Adoption of the Gateway Master Plan, a long-term roadmap to transform Columbia Gateway from a traditional office park with office and industrial uses into a thriving mixed-use, high-density innovation district. Housing goals reflected in this plan include 20% moderate income housing units (MIHUs), pursuing additional affordable units through incentives or partnerships, and ensuring at least 10% of affordable units are accessible to persons with disabilities.



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- The planned Long Reach Village Center redevelopment and rezoning of the retail center into a mixed-use campus with townhomes, senior housing, community spaces, a grocery store, arts opportunities, and safe pedestrian and bike connections.

In October 2023, we launched our Housing Opportunities are Meant for Everyone initiative, known as HOME. Comprised of a suite of policy and programmatic initiatives, HOME is aimed at tackling housing affordability in Howard County. HOME proposals included an expansion of Howard County's Right to Purchase law, state legislation to expand financing options for the creation of new affordable housing units, new rental assistance programs for students and families experiencing homelessness, and home accessibility modifications for seniors and people with disabilities.

In April 2024, we launched our Opportunities for Wealth-Building Now initiative, known as OWN. Through OWN, Howard County is growing and expanding homeownership opportunities. By expanding access to low-interest financing for downpayment assistance, improving home renovation loan criteria and investing in homeownership programs, Howard County is working towards making affordable homeownership more accessible to current and future residents. Since taking office, our administration's homeownership programs have helped more than 330 families gain access to affordable homeownership, including more than 100 families through the OWN initiative. Additionally, through the County's Moderate Income Housing Unit (MIHU) program, more than 500 families are participating in the program and building equity as homeowners.

While aligned with the legislation's intent, we believe its success depends on a transparent and collaborative path forward that meaningfully considers: (1) how density requirements may support or hinder the development of these diverse housing types; (2) if the missing middle housing types can only be built on undeveloped/ unimproved vacant properties or also through redevelopment of existing lots; and (3) clearly defining all housing types including stacked townhomes, duplex, triplex, and quadplex. However, we appreciate that this legislation allows local jurisdictions to maintain their existing setback requirements while offering flexibility for parking, height and other bulk regulations and design guidelines. This legislation is supported by policies in our General Plan while recognizing need for local zoning flexibility.

I believe strongly in our responsibility to thoughtfully guide Howard County's future. When we collaborate across levels of government and stay connected to our residents, we can make progress that reflects both fairness and common sense. Supporting this bill is one step toward ensuring our community remains welcoming, economically sustainable, and open to people at every stage of life.

I again urge the Committee's support for **HB778**.

Respectfully,

Calvin Ball
Howard County Executive