



CHARLES COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

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Acting County Administrator

February 17, 2026

RE: Letter of Information: SENATE BILL 325 - Land Use - Permitting - Development Rights (Maryland Housing Certainty Act)

Dear Members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

On behalf of the Charles County Board of County Commissioners, I write to provide information to the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee concerning Senate Bill 325 entitled Land Use - Permitting - Development Rights (Maryland Housing Certainty Act), which proposes to alter existing local authority over certain land use and zoning matters. Local control of land use and zoning in Maryland has deep roots in the State's commitment to home-rule and community self-determination. While the State authorizes zoning through enabling legislation, Maryland has long placed primary responsibility for land-use decisions in the hands of counties and municipalities. This framework reflects the understanding that land-use issues are inherently local, shaped by distinct histories, geographies, economies, and civic priorities. Over time, local zoning authority has become a central tool for managing growth, protecting environmental and historic resources, coordinating infrastructure, and balancing private property rights with the public interest. The importance of local control in Maryland lies in its flexibility and responsiveness, allowing communities to adapt state policy goals to local conditions while giving residents a direct voice in shaping the places where they live and work.

The proposed Maryland Housing Certainty Act of 2026 (HB 548/SB 325) significantly reduces local control over land-use decisions by granting early vesting rights to development projects. Locking in zoning and regulatory standards at the time of application limits the County's ability to respond to changing community needs, updated comprehensive plans, or emerging infrastructure constraints. Additionally, delaying or restricting the collection of development impact fees and excise taxes would strain local budgets and hinder the timely provision of schools, public safety, roads, utilities, and other public services and infrastructure needed to support new development. While the County recognizes the goal of increasing housing production, eliminating the ability to respond to local concerns and challenges as well as limiting the timely collection of fees and taxes which offset the impact of development will significantly hamper the ability of Charles County to effectively keep up with growth.

Charles County is a growing jurisdiction, and ranks as the third fastest growing county in the State of Maryland. This is a point of great pride in our community in that it reflects our jurisdiction as welcoming and attractive to prospective residents. What it also means is that we must evolve to meet the needs of our growing community. This may include reassessment of public safety standards, infrastructure capacity,

and environmental conditions to ensure the health, safety and welfare of our citizens and visitors. This bill would restrict local regulatory authority by requiring development applications remain governed by the regulations in effect at the time the application was submitted, and would grant developers expanded vested rights for extended periods, failing to account for the changing dynamics within the County. We fully appreciate the housing shortage and affordability challenges faced by residents of the State, but we in Charles County have continuously demonstrated an ability to allow for smart growth while ensuring adherence to our regulations. The consequences of allowing early vesting will place development out of step with the changing community and potentially demotivate developers from pursuing projects in a timely manner, which is the exact opposite outcome intended by this legislation.

It is also important to mention that the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development has published a 2030 Housing Production Target for Charles County which is 5,516 units. With a 10-year average of 822 new residential units per year (including 1,178 in 2025) and an additional 200-300 units per year within our municipalities, Charles County is on target to meet the published DHCD target without state intervention in applicable regulations. Charles County is managing growth responsibly and effectively, while also meeting state targets. It is important that the legislature preserves local land use and zoning authority for individual jurisdictions to adequately manage infrastructure, keep up with growth, respond to community concerns and vision, and maintain a fiscally constrained budget. *Should this bill be found favorable, we urge the Senate to exempt counties already meeting the DHCD housing targets, as they are meeting their prescribed contribution of new housing units without undue fiscal impact.*

This committee may be unaware that, in our experience, the greatest lag in local regulatory approvals is in meeting the State's stormwater regulations that are mandated to be administered by the counties. We believe that enhanced cooperation between the State and local regulatory agencies, and more flexibility in reaching the State performance goals, would spur a greater impact than the rigid processes currently in place. We encourage the State to consider ways in which its regulations may be improved upon to expedite increased housing.

Charles County respectfully urges the General Assembly to carefully consider the impact of this proposal on local governments that are already planning for, and accommodating, growth in a responsible and transparent manner. Preserving local land-use and zoning authority is essential to ensuring that development aligns with community vision, infrastructure capacity, fiscal sustainability, and meaningful public participation. We remain committed to meeting Maryland's housing goals and supporting affordability, but firmly believe these objectives are best achieved through collaboration and partnership, not state preemption. We ask the Legislature to continue to respect and uphold the long-standing principle of local control in land-use decision-making.

**COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF
CHARLES COUNTY, MARYLAND**



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cc: Charles County Delegation