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JACOB R. DAY
Secretary
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Deputy Secretary

DATE: March 31, 2026
BILL NO.: House Bill 691
TITLE: State Government – Procedures – Permitting Efficiency for Housing Development Projects
COMMITTEE: Senate Education, Energy, & the Environment Committee

Letter of Opposition

Description of Bill:

House Bill 691 requires each unit in the executive branch that is responsible for issuing a permit related to housing construction to adopt procedures to streamline the permitting process. A streamlined permitting process allows for concurrent filing and adjudication of multiple approvals for one project, predictable sequencing of filings and adjudications, and a framework allowing for expedited review of permits (including clear escalation and prioritization pathways). The State Housing Ombudsman would be required, to the extent feasible, to ensure consistency between the streamlined permitting processes of the various agencies, and to report on the development and implementation of the streamlined processes.

Background and Analysis:

On September 3, 2025, Governor Moore signed the Housing Starts Here executive order, which aims to address Maryland's affordable housing crisis by accelerating housing production across the state. With regard to permitting, the order requires each principal department of the Executive Branch that issues permits related to housing construction to: (1) designate a senior point of contact for coordination of permit processing; (2) submit to the Office of the Governor and the Maryland Coordinated Permitting Review Council updated permit application processing procedures; (3) create and implement standards and procedures for applicants for State-issued permits related to housing development to hire third-party reviewers to help expedite the process; (4) assess additional potential legislative, regulatory, and administrative actions to increase permitting efficiency; (5) engage in simultaneous, rather than sequential, review of permit applications, to the extent allowed by law; (6) provide recommendations of ways to increase predictability and transparency related to applications for housing-related permits; and (7) fully digitize permit applications and fee payments within the extent of budgetary authority. Finally, the order required DHCD to designate a State Housing Ombudsman, whose duties include coordinating and reporting on the activities undertaken by the executive departments and State agencies to streamline the permitting process.

House Bill 691 and the Housing Starts Here executive order share the laudable goal of streamlining the permitting process for housing development projects across executive agencies. As initiated by the executive order, the relevant agencies have reviewed their permit processes and are actively in the process of streamlining them. Both House Bill 691 and the Housing Starts Here executive order apply to executive branch agencies, direct those agencies to streamline permitting procedures, and specifically encourage concurrent permitting when possible. Both also require the State Housing Ombudsman to coordinate and report on the progress of permit streamlining. The executive order further directs agencies to digitize permit applications and payment fees and to allow for third-party permit reviewers. The policies being proposed in this bill are already being implemented through Executive Order, making the legislation duplicative.

DHCD Position

Maryland DHCD respectfully requests an unfavorable report on HB 691.

