



Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Testimony on: SB0036 “Land Use – Zoning – Limitations (Starter and Silver Homes Act of 2026) “

Position: Unfavorable

Hearing Date: February 17, 2026

Valleys Planning Council, a non-profit that conserves land and resources, preserves historic character and maintains the rural feel and land uses in northwestern Baltimore County, urges SB0036 receive an unfavorable report based on what passing it will do to the value and desirability of existing housing; the resulting overloading of infrastructure; lack of workers to build the proposed housing; and what overbuilt areas will look like in a few decades. Most objectionably, the bill reduces home rule authority, eroding the ability of counties to plan for growth. On the heels of a bill last year that took away the right of counties to site solar facilities, this bill feels like the state is trying to inappropriately centralize zoning power.

Under this bill, the value of some existing homes would decrease. If I build three townhomes on my half-acre lot in a neighborhood of single-family homes, my neighbors’ homes will become less desirable, worth less, and produce less tax revenue for the county. The minimal setbacks called for in the bill will lead to homeowners finding themselves living cheek-by-jowl in areas where they thought they had “breathing room”. If these townhomes become rentals, conditions for existing homeowners may become untenable.

Infrastructure will be overloaded. In Baltimore County, where I live, the sewer system is subject to a consent decree. While it has spent hundreds of millions of dollars to repair and replace failing sewers, Baltimore County has not demonstrated that the fixes have resulted in adequate capacity for existing development. Adding thousands of homes will result in even more stress on an already-overloaded system. Schools, roads, and fire and emergency services will similarly be stressed. More impervious surfaces will lead to more stormwater runoff that will need to be managed even as climate change causes more frequent and larger storms.

Who will build all those houses? The trades are stretched thin as it is. Becoming a licensed electrician or a licensed journeyman plumber takes four to five years. Counties will have to hire more people to review plans.

Nationwide, families are smaller than they used to be. Logically, there will be fewer people buying homes in the decades to come. In 2060, who will want to live in townhouses sandwiched onto lots in established neighborhoods in 2030? Modern housing, especially that built specifically to be “affordable”, is not built to last the way houses built 75 years ago were. Baltimore County could end up with quantities of outdated, vacant homes, a problem Baltimore City has been facing for at least 40 years.

Counties should be able to decide where housing should go and what it should look like. Valleys Planning Council urges an unfavorable report on SB0036.

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