



Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 829
Land Use – Multifamily Developments and Mixed–Use Developments – Authorization
(Bring Back Main Street Act)

Before the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
February 24, 2026

Chair and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jessamine Duvall, and I am the Executive Director of Columbia Housing Center, a nonprofit organization based in Howard County that works to expand access to safe, stable, and affordable housing through direct assistance, education, and policy advocacy. I respectfully submit this testimony in support of Senate Bill 829.

Maryland is facing a persistent housing shortage that is driving up costs and limiting access to opportunity across our counties. In high-demand jurisdictions, zoning restrictions continue to limit the development of multifamily housing—even on parcels already served by water and sewer infrastructure and located in commercial or recreational zones. SB 829 addresses this disconnect by allowing multifamily and mixed-use developments as permitted uses on appropriate parcels in larger counties, while preserving local authority over siting and design.

I want to emphasize that this bill does not eliminate local planning authority. Counties retain the ability to regulate site design, require on-site parking, and dedicate a portion of floor space to retail uses where appropriate. This bill does exactly what Maryland needs right now—it removes unnecessary barriers that delay or prevent housing production—particularly in areas already suitable for development.

By allowing housing in commercially zoned areas that are currently underutilized, the bill supports smart growth principles, strengthens local economies, and advances environmental sustainability goals. Locating housing near services, employment centers, and infrastructure reduces sprawl, shortens commutes, and makes more efficient use of existing public investments.

From our work assisting families across Howard County, we see daily the consequences of constrained housing supply: households competing for too few units, rising rents, and increasing instability. Expanding opportunities for multifamily and mixed-use housing in appropriate locations is an easy and direct way for the State to alleviate these pressures.

SB 829 also appropriately balances affordability requirements by ensuring counties cannot impose inclusionary mandates beyond what is already required in residential zones, while preserving the ability to regulate consistent with existing policy. This provides predictability to developers and encourages production, which is essential to long-term affordability.

At a time when many Marylanders are struggling to remain in the communities where they work and raise their families and young people are leaving the state due to lack of housing affordability, we must modernize land use policies to reflect current housing realities. SB 829 is a thoughtful step toward aligning zoning with infrastructure, market demand, and statewide housing goals.

For these reasons, Columbia Housing Center respectfully urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 829.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lambert", is positioned above the typed name and title.

Executive Director
Columbia Housing Center