



**Testimony to the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
Evidence – Interception of Oral Communications– Fair Housing Testing
Position: Favorable**

January 22, 2026

The Honorable Will Smith, Chair
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
cc: Members, Judicial Proceedings Committee

Chair Smith and Members of the Committee:

Economic Action Maryland Fund is a statewide coalition of individuals and organizations that advances economic rights, equity, and housing justice for Maryland families through research, education, direct service, and advocacy. Our 12,500 supporters include consumer advocates, practitioners, and low-income and working families throughout Maryland.

I am here in strong support of SB180 and thank Senator Sydnor for introducing the legislation. SB180 enables fair housing organizations to more effectively test and enforce Maryland's anti-discrimination laws. I also want to thank the committee for passing this bill out of committee twice. **The bill before you is identical to the bill you passed in 2025 and 2024.**

At the federal level, the staffing and funding of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has been slashed. As a result, federal investigation and enforcement of fair housing complaints have fallen.

A recent report found that complaints of housing discrimination have mounted with disability-related discrimination being the most reported complaint, followed by discrimination based on race and national origin¹. **Against this backdrop, it is more important than ever that Maryland strengthen its ability to detect, deter, and enforce fair housing laws.**

Fair housing testing employs individuals to pose as prospective tenants or homeowners to gather information to determine whether or not a provider is complying with state and federal laws related to fair housing. Fair housing testing is crucial for: detecting discrimination, enforcing fair housing laws, and evaluating the effectiveness of existing policies.

Fair housing organizations and fair housing programs have been in place in Maryland since the 1960s. Fair housing organizations working in Maryland have been testing in Maryland all of this

¹ <https://www.housingwire.com/articles/fair-housing-complaints-mount-amid-hud-staffing-cuts/>

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time-this bill simply provides fair housing testers with more effective tools to be able to document civil rights discrimination in a way that will result in greater enforcement and accountability.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) recommends equipping testers with recording devices for fair housing testing. SB180 permits the interception of oral communications under narrowly designed circumstances in order to conduct fair housing testing.

Thirty-nine other states allow certified fair housing organizations to record conversations to test for housing discrimination. Maryland lags behind these states in passing this exemption and notably in its fair housing enforcement.

There are a number of reasons to pass SB180. It will:

- **Strengthens fair housing enforcement & justice in Maryland.** The ability to document test experiences through audio recordings provides incontrovertible evidence of illegal housing discrimination
- **Protects Testers and Housing Providers.** Having an exact account of a conversation protects testers from any credibility or bias as well as protects housing providers from false allegations, misunderstandings, or faulty memories of testers.
- **Efficient Allocation of Resources.** Saves fair housing organizations money because they can reduce the number of testers used, thereby saving using city, county, state, and federal funds more efficiently and effectively. The use of recorders also allows organizations to maintain the highest investigative standards.
- **There is no right to privacy that would preclude this.** The Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division uses one party recorders in Maryland and across the country. The commercial discussions that take place are taking place in commercial spaces so should not be considered private.

SB180 strengthens Maryland's ability to enforce fair housing laws statewide, uphold the highest evidentiary standards in court, protect housing testers and providers, and make Maryland the fortieth state in the country to better equip fair housing organizations to root out discrimination and make Maryland a more just place for all to live.

For all these reasons, we support SB180 and urge a favorable report.

Best,

Marceline White
Executive Director

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