



PREPARED TESTIMONY

**THE IMPORTANCE OF ENDING DISCRIMINATION RELATED TO
HOUSING FOR RETURNING CITIZENS IN MARYLAND (SB 937)**

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Baltimoreans United In Leadership Development (BUILD)

Good evening, and thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Ramioka Robinson.

BUILD (Baltimoreans United In Leadership Development) strongly supports the passage of SB 937 which would end discrimination in housing for most returning citizens in Maryland.

Over the last three years, BUILD and Turnaround Tuesday have listened to more than 1,000 returning citizens and others directly affected by the criminal justice system. This represents a small part of the more than one people with a record who live throughout Maryland.

We asked each of them what was the biggest roadblock for them coming home from incarceration. We heard story after story, but the #1 issue by far was housing.

This is not abstract for me. I am here not just as an advocate, and not just as a professional working in reentry and education—but as a formerly incarcerated woman whose life was put at risk because I could not access safe housing.

I served my sentence—but my punishment did not end when I was released.

As a native Washington, D.C., I was released into Baltimore with no family and no housing. Because of my record, housing options were closed off entirely.

Even though I had been released, I still felt trapped—this time by policy, stigma, and systemic barriers.

With nowhere else to go, I moved in with a former partner, and that situation became abusive. If Fair Chance Housing had been in place, I would have had a real chance to choose safety instead of survival.

Fair Chance Housing is not a reward or a handout—it is the foundation of safety.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs teaches us that before growth or stability, people must first have safety.

Without securing safe housing first, employment, education, recovery, and compliance all become unstable.

How can we expect people to rebuild their lives why simultaneously denying them the foundation needed

to do so?

When housing is denied based solely on a record, it pushes people toward harm, homelessness, or survival choices that undermine public safety.

That is not rehabilitation—it is a continuation of punishment.

Today, I stand before you as someone who survived—and someone who works every day to make reentry safer for others.

I strongly urge you to pass the Fair Chance Housing Act so that release in Maryland means safety, dignity, and a real opportunity to succeed.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

BUILD's History and Track Record on this issue

BUILD – Baltimoreans United In Leadership Development – is a broad-based, non-partisan coalition of more than 35 religious congregations, non-profits, and schools in Baltimore. Founded in 1977, BUILD has a long, productive track record acting on issues related to housing, jobs, schools, safety, and more. This has included the creation of the nation's first living wage ordinance in Baltimore City and working with the state legislature to invest \$1 billion in rebuilding Baltimore City's aging school infrastructure in recent years. We are part of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), the nation's oldest and largest multi-faith organizing network in the United States.

In 2014, BUILD leaders in East Baltimore worked together to launch Turnaround Tuesday, a workforce development movement that connects returning citizens to living wage jobs through direct relationships with employers like Johns Hopkins, the University of Maryland, and more. To date, Turnaround Tuesday has connected more than 2,000 people – mostly returning citizens – to living wage jobs at employers and anchor institutions across Baltimore. Of those, 71% stay for at least two years.

In 2024, BUILD and Turnaround Tuesday led the successful fight to end parole fees for returning citizens in Maryland. This bill was supported by a broad coalition of local and national allies. Following the bill's passage, Gov. Wes Moore announced that he would eliminate \$13 million in debt from parole fees that were past due.

During the 2026 legislative session, we gathered nearly 300 people – mostly people with a record – here in Annapolis to express support for two bills: Clean Slate and Fair Chance Housing.