



Testimony In Support of the Maryland Fair Chance Housing Act
HB 1073 / SB 937

Minister Thomas Anderson (BUILD) & Thibault Manekin (CEO of Seawall)

Minister Thomas Anderson:

My name is Minister Thomas Anderson and I am a leader with BUILD (Baltimoreans United In Leadership Development) and a minister at Zion Baptist Church in Baltimore City. BUILD is a coalition of almost 50 religious congregations and non-profits in Baltimore City and County and is strongly in support of the Fair Chance Housing Act.

As you will hear today in person -- 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. 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.

We heard about landlords refusing to rent because of criminal background. People wasting money on 5 or 6 applications just to be denied. People not getting a response. And people having to lie or have another person submit an application for them to get an apartment. People going into depression or having to stay in shelters or unsafe locations because they could not find housing.

But I want to share my own story.

I am a former lifer, and I spent 22 and a half years behind prison bars.

When I was released in 2019, I believed I had fully paid my debt to society – only to find that although the prison gates were open, the doors of opportunity were still locked.

I was treated as if I was still expected to pay a debt that I no longer owed. I wore a scarlet letter that branded me, humiliated me, emasculated me, and mutilated my progress. And despite having worked hard to obtain a good job, good credit, and good standing in the community, I was repeatedly denied the dignity of fair and equitable housing.

So in an attempt to change that, I joined forces with BUILD and Turnaround Tuesday to address this issue that impacts me and the more than 1 million people with a record here in Maryland.

Thibault Manekin, Seawall

My name is Thibault Manekin. I'm a real estate developer in Baltimore and the CEO of Seawall, where we develop and operate multifamily housing across the city.

I'm writing in strong support of the Fair Chance Housing Act.

I've been fortunate to build a community of incredible friends in Baltimore. Some of the most inspiring people I know are men who have been impacted by the criminal justice system—men who have served long sentences, who came home, did the hard work, got educated, and are now artists, entrepreneurs, leaders, and advocates in our city.

One of those men is my friend Thomas Anderson, who you've heard testimony from above.

Recently, Thomas shared something with me that stopped me in my tracks.

Without telling me, he applied to rent an apartment in one of our Seawall buildings. He was in the process of looking for housing, but – more than that – he wanted to understand what the process felt like for someone with a record like his.

His application was denied.

When he told me, I was embarrassed.

Here is a man who is helping lead BUILD, one of the most impactful organizations in Baltimore, someone who is actively making our city safer, stronger, and more connected than I ever could—and he couldn't rent an apartment in a building that I helped create.

That can't be the system we stand behind.

If we truly believe in second chances, then our housing policies need to reflect that.

This bill is not just about fairness—it's about unlocking human potential, strengthening our communities, and aligning our practices with the values we say we hold.

I'm proud to stand in support of it, alongside many of my colleagues in the development community.