



HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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March 11, 2026

The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr., Chair
Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT of Senate Bill 0941**: Economic Matters – Department of Housing and Community Development - Severe Health and Safety Risk Properties – Intervention Plan

Dear Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Committee:

I want to express my appreciation to Senator Henson for her leadership on Senate Bill 0941 Department of Housing and Community Development – Severe Health and Safety Risk Properties – Intervention Plan (SB0941). This legislation would require the State to identify severe health and safety risk properties and provide effective interventions to mitigate predatory, non-compliant and negligent landlords of multi-unit rental properties.

In Howard County, approximately 30 percent of households live in rental properties. Unfortunately, too many of our tenants face unresolved or reoccurring habitability issues that can affect their health and safety.

Howard County's Division of Rental Licensing in the Department of Inspections, Licenses and Permits is responsible for licensing rental properties and requiring compliance with health and safety standards. The Department has a process to identify at risk properties, accept complaints and referrals from tenants and other organizations and determine appropriate interventions through licensing requirements, fines, and legal remedies.

Howard County's Office of Consumer Protection provides support to tenants and the Department of Inspections, Licenses and Permits where properties with severe health and safety risks are identified.

Launched on January 30, 2026, our LIVE (**L**andlord accountability, **I**nteragency coordination, **V**ictim protection and **E**vacuation prevention) initiative, is taking steps to support tenants and landlords by exploring an increase in rental housing enforcement and new avenues to resolve disputes, providing greater accessibility to landlord/tenant education and resources, and offering more interagency coordination to eliminate delays in complaint processing.

Since 2019, the County's:

- Office of Consumer Protection (OCP) has received on average 600 inquiries and 200 landlord/tenant complaints a year;
- Department of Inspections, Licensing, and Permits (DILP) has issued more than 2,500 rental housing notice of violations a year; and
- Office of Human Rights and Equity (OHRE) has annually received approximately eight housing



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discrimination complaints concerning issues that span from refusal to rent to lease termination.



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Since 2019, 93 percent of the notice of violations issued by DILP were because of the proactive enforcement by the department's Rental Housing Investigation Unit. In 2024, the County elevated OCP to be a standalone office due to growing caseload that was interrelated with other constituent and enforcement related services handled by the County's OHRE, Department of Community Resources and Services (DCRS), DILP, and the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD).

My LIVE Executive Order (EO) addresses habitability concerns experienced by tenants by expanding and strengthening the County departments and offices that handle landlord-tenant complaints by:

- Empowering tenants and landlords with information as to their rights and requirements under the law;
- Removing language barriers to access resources;
- Expanding resources to those experiencing a housing crisis; and
- Creating efficient complaint processes with alternative ways to resolve disputes.

In Howard County, every dwelling or dwelling unit not occupied solely by the owner or owner's immediate family requires a Rental Housing License; this license is issued by DILP. This EO calls for the County to evaluate increasing the number of inspectors in DILPs' Rental Housing Enforcement Division in Fiscal Year (FY) 2027. It also requires DILP to provide an annual update to its Rental Housing Checklist for landlords and that the checklist be translated in the top five spoken languages in Howard County.

The EO also orders OCP to:

- Evaluate increasing the number of its staff in FY 2027 to further support conciliations between landlords and tenants and to administer an arbitration program to help resolve landlord tenant disputes.
- Increase its [landlord and tenant](#) outreach and education program by:
 - Translating the Landlord Tenant Assistance publication and other related documentation into five additional languages beyond the required translation to English, Spanish, Chinese, and French.
 - Updating the Landlord Tenant Assistance publication with legal resources, rental assistance resources, and utility assistance resources.

Enacting statewide legislation would strengthen Howard County's policies and help ensure that landlords provide decent, safe and healthy rental units for tenants throughout the state.

I urge the Committee's **favorable report on SB0941**.

Respectfully,

Calvin Ball
Howard County Executive