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September 18, 2025

Land Use and Transportation Committee
Baltimore City Council
Baltimore City Hall, Room 408
100 N. Holliday St.
Baltimore, MD 21202

**RE: Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership Testimony in Support of City Council
Bill 25-0062 Single Exit from Residential Occupancy**

Dear Chair Dorsey, Vice Chair Middleton and Honorable Committee Members:

On behalf of the Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership, I am writing to express strong support for **City Council Bill 25-0062**, which proposes updating Baltimore's building code to allow residential buildings up to six stories high to be constructed with a single stairway. This bill represents a meaningful step toward creating a more affordable, equitable, and sustainable Baltimore by enabling more efficient use of space and resources.

At BRHP, our mission is to expand housing choices for families historically excluded from opportunity-rich neighborhoods. As the Regional Administrator for the Baltimore Housing Mobility Program, we serve over 4,300 families, helping them transition from areas of concentrated poverty to communities where they can thrive. Our work is grounded in [research](#) that shows that where you live shapes your access to education, employment, health, and safety. Yet, we consistently encounter a major obstacle: the lack of affordable housing in well-resourced neighborhoods.

Currently, Baltimore's building code requires two stairways for any residential building over three stories. This mandate significantly increases construction costs

and reduces usable floor space. According to a [report from The Pew Charitable Trusts](#), the requirement for a second stairway and connecting corridor can consume 7% of a building's floor area and add 6–13% to total construction costs. These added costs make it harder to build affordable housing and often render small-scale infill projects economically infeasible. The result is fewer homes built, higher rents, and continued vacancy in areas that could otherwise thrive.

Baltimore is facing a severe shortage of affordable homes. **[Over half of Baltimore renters are cost-burdened](#)**, and thousands of families are struggling to find homes that meet their needs and budgets. Alarming, over [20% of all Baltimore households spend over half their income on housing](#), and 92% of these severely burdened households are earning less than half of the area median income. Recent reporting from the [Baltimore Banner](#) on the latest U.S. Census Bureau data further underscores the affordability crisis for renters, finding that 39% of occupied rental units housed tenants make less than \$35,000 a year, and more than half of those families spent 50% or more of their income on rent. These numbers reflect a housing system that is failing thousands of families across our city, and we must act to ensure these families are not left behind.

Baltimore has the opportunity to join a growing movement and lead the way in smart, equitable housing policy. Cities like Seattle and New York allow single-stair buildings up to six stories, and the Pew research found no fire-related deaths linked to the lack of a second exit over the 12 years studied. Importantly, this bill includes modern fire prevention standards to ensure no compromise on safety.

For the families BRHP serves—many of whom have been historically excluded and priced out of the housing market or subjected to living in overcrowded or substandard conditions—this bill offers a pathway to safe, stable, and affordable housing in communities of opportunity. By easing overly restrictive requirements, Baltimore can pursue new housing potential in a variety of neighborhoods across the city, directly aligning with our mission to expand housing choices for low-income families.

For these reasons, we respectfully request the committee's support for Bill 25-0062 to support the housing needs of our residents.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Adria Crutchfield
Executive Director

About the [Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership](#):

The Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership (BRHP) is a non-profit organization that expands housing choices for low-income families who have historically been excluded from housing in well-resourced neighborhoods by helping them access and transition successfully to safe, healthy, and economically vibrant communities. As the Regional Administrator for the Baltimore Housing Mobility Program, BRHP has been opening pathways to better futures for low-income families for over 10 years. BRHP currently provides over 4,300 low-income families rental assistance in the form of Housing Choice Vouchers coupled with counseling support for families as they move from areas of concentrated poverty to areas of opportunity in Baltimore City and the five surrounding counties.