



**Testimony to the Economic and Community Development Committee
Bill 21-0004: Office to End Homelessness - Establishment, Administration, and Permanent
Housing Voucher Program
Position: Favorable**

February 23, 2021

Sharon Green Middleton, Chair
Economic and Community Development Committee
Cc: Members, Economic and Community Development Committee

Chair Middleton and Members of the Committee:

The Fair Housing Action Center of Maryland is a program of the Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition that works to ensure Marylanders have safe, affordable housing, free from discrimination, harassment, and code violations.

The Fair Housing Action Center MD is in support of Bill 21-0004.

Baltimore is in the midst of a decades-long affordable housing crisis. More than half of Baltimore's renters live in housing they cannot afford; a third of Baltimore renters spend more than half their income on rent. But the worst of the affordable housing crisis falls on the thousands of people experiencing homelessness each night. There are over 2,000 people living in Baltimore City without a home. This burden is unequally distributed among protected classes; severe cost burden, an indicator of extreme housing needs and homeless risk, is nearly twice as high for Black and Hispanic households as for white non-Hispanic households. It is also higher for single person households than for families. These indicators depict an all too common narrative in this country and in this city; the need for robust affordable housing and public subsidies is a matter of Fair Housing, but also of racial equity.

The Baltimore Metropolitan Council recently conducted an analysis of the impediments to fair housing in the region. The number one fair housing issue they identified was, "A significant shortage of deeply affordable rentals and public subsidies." The lack of affordable housing and public subsidies results in cost burden, overcrowding/doubling up, an increased risk of eviction, a higher risk of homelessness, and a lack of economic opportunity.

Additionally, there is almost no housing that people who rely on Social Security disability can afford. So even when people who have experienced chronic homelessness get the help they need, there's still no where they can afford to live. This bill fixes that. The permanent housing voucher program created by this bill is thoughtfully designed to help individuals and families transition out of supportive housing programs.



Furthermore, it is important to note that this bill has been introduced at an opportune time. The Housing Opportunities Made Equal (HOME) Act went into effect last October. This state law expands upon the Baltimore City HOME Act, and makes it illegal for landlords to discriminate against prospective renters based on their lawful source of income, providing protections for people who receive alimony, Social Security benefits and housing vouchers. With the protections provided by the HOME Act, the bill presented before the committee today has the potential to create real change in Baltimore City.

For these reasons, we support Bill 21-0004 and urge a favorable report.

Best,

Robyn Dorsey
Fair Housing Director