

HEALTH CARE FOR THE HOMELESS TESTIMONY
IN SUPPORT OF
Baltimore City Council Bill 25-0062 – Building Code – Single Exit from
Residential Occupancy

The Land Use and Transportation Committee

September 18, 2025



Health Care for the Homeless strongly supports City Council Bill 25-0062 - Building Code – Single Exit from Residential Occupancy, which would allow for certain types of residential buildings to have a single exit or access to a single exit as long as current fire safety standards are followed. Such reforms to Baltimore City’s building code will allow for more construction of multi-family residential buildings and higher density residential development, which is desperately needed to help address the affordable housing crisis our city faces. City Council Bill 25-0062 is part of a broader housing affordability and development package known as The Housing Options & Opportunity Package, which Health Care for the Homeless strongly supports. 25-0062, along with the housing package in its entirety, will increase housing density, lower housing costs, and have tremendous benefits to the community and future residents of our city.

Health Care for the Homeless is Maryland’s leading provider of integrated health services and supportive housing for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. We deliver integrated medical care, behavioral health services, dental care and harm reduction interventions for more than 11,000 people annually at multiple clinic sites in Baltimore City and Baltimore County and through a Mobile Clinic and Street Medicine team. We also support more than 800 highly vulnerable Baltimoreans in more than 550 units of permanent supportive housing.

We believe that everyone deserves a home they can afford in a stable and healthy community, but most renters in Baltimore pay more than they can afford on their housing. In response, Health Care for the Homeless formed a subsidiary non-profit organization known as HCH Real Estate Company, Inc. HCH Real Estate Co, Inc. develops affordable and supportive multifamily rental housing in Baltimore. Our projects are designed to be community-centered, environmentally sustainable and deeply affordable.

Current building codes generally require residential buildings to provide multiple exits, even when a single, well-designed exit could meet modern safety standards. This requirement often adds cost, physical size and space, and complexity to housing projects.

City Council Bill 25-0062 will have benefits across the city, but those benefits will be particularly felt in smaller multifamily projects and projects that are more highly integrated into existing residential communities where we have the worst vacancy rates. This bill can make it easier for more development in our row home neighborhoods with high vacancy generally. Small projects like our Franklin Square¹ project will very likely benefit from this bill. From our real estate development work, we know that comparable safety is achievable with modern technology and allows more sensible floor plans in small projects. Without the need to build unnecessary additional stairwells, it means more space for more units and amenities.

City Council Bill 25-0062, in conjunction with the other bills in the Housing Options & Opportunity Package, will increase density, lower costs, and have tremendous benefits to the community. We fully support this bill and urge this Committee's support.

For more information about our agency, visit www.hchmd.org and www.hchreco.org.

Our Vision: Everyone is healthy and has a safe home in a just and respectful community.

Our Mission: We work to end homelessness through racially equitable health care, housing and advocacy in partnership with those of us who have experienced it.

¹ Franklin Square is one such project that can benefit from City Council Bill 25-0062. The Franklin Square Project is a 19-unit new construction affordable housing development slated for the Franklin Square neighborhood of Baltimore City. Developed by HCH Real Estate Co and Unity Properties, the project would transform the long vacant lots located at 4-20 N. Mount Street and contribute to ongoing revitalization efforts in Franklin Square. The unit mix would include eleven (11) one-bedroom units, three (3) two-bedroom, and five (5) three-bedroom units; accommodating individuals and families. The housing will be priced affordably with 10 units priced for households earning 30% AMI, 7 units at 50%, and 2 units at 60% AMI. Amenities include controlled access, onsite case management, private meeting spaces, a fitness room, in-unit laundry, and a spacious lobby. The Franklin Square Project is unique in that it will provide tenant services for all residents and specialized supportive services for the 10 deeply affordable units to accommodate households currently experiencing homelessness. For more information about our projects, see <https://hchreco.org/our-projects>.