



Alex Fitts

Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Ave
Rockville, MD 20850
24 March 2023

Re: Testimony in support of the HOME Act, Bill 16-23; and in opposition to the 'Anti-Rent Gouging' Bill 15-23
Honorable Members of the County Council,

Hello, my name is Alex Fitts and I am a resident of Silver Spring, and specifically a constituent of Natali Fani-González. I'm here to speak on behalf of over 500 members of the Montgomery County branch of Democratic Socialists of America or MOCO DSA. I would like to express our strong support for the HOME Act, Bill 16-23, while also urging you to reject the "Anti-Rent Gouging" Bill 15-23.

Our members are all too familiar with the exorbitant rate increases that would still be allowed by the so-called Anti-Rent Gouging Bill. Like Alex Banks who saw a 15% hike in his rent just this past year. Other members' continued residency in Montgomery County hinges on the exact cap that goes into law. One member, Tim, has already been displaced from Bethesda to PG county due to a 10% rent increase. Yet another member was recently forced to move to Takoma Park due to rent increases but now feels more secure in their living situation as a result of Takoma Park's rent stabilization.

Just hearing our member's individual situations gives a sense of the precarity so many folks are experiencing right now: A member on a fixed income who worries about their ability to rent in MoCo despite having roots in the area. A young person who can barely afford to rent a small apartment near their work in downtown Bethesda despite her and her partner having jobs related to their degrees. They did everything right, but still they are struggling. And finally, a parent who rents due to necessity and has only been able to stay in MoCo due to the luck and grace of a landlord who has not increased rent significantly. Being able to stay in MoCo should not come down to a single landlord's disposition.

These horrible experiences extend far beyond our own organization. MOCO DSA has spent the past 3 months knocking over 3200 doors at The Blairs, Gateway, Cinnamon Run and Yorkshire apartment complexes. Everywhere we went, we heard firsthand the devastating impact of rising rents on our communities. Folks have recalled losing countless neighbors whose rents were falsely raised, who did not speak English as their native tongue, who were ill equipped to deal with the games that were being played by the management companies and ultimately, were forced to just leave. They had no other recourse.

The HOME Act is a crucial step towards addressing this crisis. By capping annual rent increases at 3%, it will provide much-needed stability and predictability for our most vulnerable neighbors. This will help families stay in their homes, avoid eviction, and build a life where all can thrive. Building more housing and keeping current residents housed is not an either-or proposition - we need to do both. The HOME Act addresses the issue of displacement, and its various provisions will accord with policies to increase supply.



In contrast, the "Anti-Rent Gouging" Bill, is a dangerous and misguided proposal that would only make things worse for renters in Montgomery County. Looking at the data for the past three years, we can say without a doubt that Bill 15-23 would codify rent gouging by allowing annual rent increases of up to roughly 15%.

It is bewildering that one of the cosponsors of Bill 15-23 and my representative, Natali Fani-González, even agrees that this would be too high a cap as she said in a recent March 2nd Washington Post article and I quote,

"Yes, there have been extreme cases of people getting 15 to 20 percent rent increases, and those are crazy," Fani-González said. "I want to focus on that and helping people in need."

How is this helping folks in need when it is just codifying those extreme cases of rent gouging?

Rent stabilization is a matter of racial and economic justice. As a community, we cannot allow landlords to take advantage of vulnerable tenants and force them out of their homes with rent increases above 3% simply because they can't afford the rent. The HOME Act will help us build a more equitable and inclusive Montgomery County, where everyone can find a safe and stable home, regardless of race, class, and income.

Sincerely,

Alex Fitts