

Alexandra Ralph


**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF THE HOME ACT, BILL 16-23;
AND IN OPPOSITION TO THE 'ANTI-RENT GOUGING' BILL 15-23**

My name is Alexandra Ralph and I live in Montgomery County District 4 in Wheaton-Glenmont. I'm 33 years old. I grew up in the same zip code where I currently live and currently work as an environmental educator.

I'm testifying because I support the HOME Act, Bill 16-23 and I strongly oppose Bill 15-23. I am demanding that the Council pass rent stabilization with a cap no higher than 3% and consider additional measures to protect tenants from unreasonable and unethical practices by landlords.

As a recent graduate from University of Maryland, I leased a studio apartment in downtown Silver Spring in 2017 for approximately \$1500 a month. I was eager to have a space of my own and feel independent. I paid approximately 40% of my monthly income in rent to afford this independence while I tried to save for a house. After my first year, the landlord increased the rent by 3%. I asked why and the property manager said the new rent was in line with the going rate in the area. For reference, I lived in the building that went up in flames recently due to delays installing sprinkler systems. The building was very old and in need of improvements, but those improvements weren't implemented with the additional money they charged. The increase in rent was purely based on the landlord taking advantage of economic trends to profit.

I believe that people born in Montgomery County, graduates from the MCPS school system, should be able to return to the area and afford to live here, near their families, like me. Protecting the stability of family networks is crucial to a healthy society. Legislation to stabilize rents directly supports this stability by prevent families from moving due to unpredictable and exorbitant rent increases.

Landowners of rental properties provide a service to the county and should be regulated as service-providers. By creating housing, they provide structure to the community even as they generate their own wealth. Rent paid by tenants contributes to landlords' equity in the property. The eventual sale of these properties produces millions in dividends. It's for this reason that I have no doubt that landlords will continue to do business in Montgomery County even with rent constraints. Property ownership is rarely a losing game.

Rent stabilization will make a small dent in the wealth of landowners in the long run, but it will make a huge difference for tenants who make up 33% of all county residents. Wages simply are not keeping up with the pace of inflation. Should we punish tenants for the volatility of the economy by tying rent increases to CPI? Absolutely not. I think the County Council should treat tenants as valued customers and constituents who deserve to be able to predict their expenses and stay in their homes and in their neighborhoods. Further, please keep in mind County's policy on racial equity. Minorities and the poor are over-represented in the tenant demographic. Failure to protect them with the HOME Act is racist – it disproportionately harms people of color. The 8% + CPI proposal of Bill 15-23 is a charade of a bill that pays lip service to landlords while guaranteeing excessive rent increases that will further disrupt our communities, particularly those who are poor and people of color.

Again, I urge you to pass the HOME Act and codify a cap on rent increases of 3%.

Thank you,
Alexandra Ralph