

## **Please Don't Pass Pro-Rent Gouging Bill 15-23 – For Racial Equity & Social Justice, Pass HOME Act**

As a resident of Takoma Park, I'm acutely aware of how much rent stabilization has strengthened and supported the stability and resilient health of our City over the last few decades. It has played a major role in our success in celebrating and preserving our racial diversity, offering a welcoming place with strong schools and good local services for hard-working immigrants from many lands to set down new roots to raise their children, and building together across our community a strong civic culture that values the continued presence and contributions of all residents. Rent stabilization has provided not just increased housing security for Takoma Park residents who rent, of whom a disproportionate share are residents of color, but also a kind of community-wide security that enriches all of our lives.

*And no, the sky has not fallen.*

In fact, similar to the provision in the HOME Act (16-23), landlords in Takoma Park are able [to petition](#) for special increases, if they find themselves in any particular year in circumstances that require that to maintain the safe, quality housing that residents deserve, while making a fair return for their own businesses. Takoma Park's suite of housing policies also includes other initiatives to prioritize fair housing, including grant assistance with downpayments for first-time home buyers who are income eligible and the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Law, which since 1986 has given tenants a right of first refusal when a landlord decides to sell. Together, these policies have supported numerous residents, on their own or organizing with other tenants, to transition from renting to home ownership without moving, and so to begin to build the kind of generational wealth and stability that has historically been disproportionately available to white families. (A success story that, on paper, may look like a "loss" of rental housing units, but in actuality is a gain for the individuals involved and our community.)

But rent stabilization in particular has been key to our community's stability and the prevention of our neighbors – your constituents! -- being forced by big rent increases to disrupt their lives, their children's lives, and the fabric of our community by having to suddenly rush to find shelter elsewhere. Now it's time for Montgomery County to apply similar wisdom countywide.

Our County, like our nation, is in the midst of a housing crisis, a social emergency. It's time for the County government to act swiftly and decisively – as governments have a responsibility to do when residents' security is at issue. I urge the Montgomery County Council to resist the lure of a faux response – which is what the misnamed "Anti-Rent Gouging" bill would be. Instead, please prioritize coming together to unanimously pass the Housing Opportunity, Mobility, and Equity (HOME) Act.

*Don't let Montgomery County's long struggle to inch toward social justice and racial equity roll backwards, on your watch.* The County's official stamp of approval on increases of 8 percent plus inflation? Anyone familiar with human psychology would predict that arguably obscene increase would eventually devolve into the new normal.

Housing is shelter. And shelter, like food and water, is a basic human need. It is, in fact, so essential to human wellbeing that long ago, in 1948, [the right to adequate housing](#) was recognized as a fundamental right by the United Nations in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Being in the business of providing safe, quality shelter to others is, therefore, an honorable way to make a living -- but it's not an honorable way to try to make a killing. The HOME Act gives ample room for honorable landlords and responsible developers to make a good living. But it does so while protecting the basic right to adequate

shelter for so many of your constituents who are renting their homes -- by protecting them from being displaced from our County by unreasonable and unpredictable increases in rent.

**In closing, please take to heart the summary statements of your own Office of Legislative Oversight**, as to the profound impact that one of the two rent-related bills before you could have in advancing our County's most pressing social goals, compared to the smallness of the other bill's potential, at a moment when smallness in acting to achieve equity should not be an option (highlighting added):

**The misnamed "Anti-Rent Gouging" bill:**

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/resjis/2023/Bill15-23.pdf>

**"Summary:** The Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) anticipates Bill 15-23 will have **a small positive impact** on racial equity and social justice (RESJ) in the County. While the proposed rent regulations would disproportionately benefit Black and Latinx tenants, the magnitude of the allowable rent increases could still displace cost-burdened Black and Latinx households. Further, the Bill **contains no provisions to prevent tenant displacement**. Nonetheless, the Bill could prevent more excessive rent increases that could worsen current racial inequities in housing insecurity.

**The HOME Act:**

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/resjis/2023/Bill16-23.pdf>

**"Summary:** The Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) anticipates Bill 16-23 will have **a moderate to large positive impact** on racial equity and social justice (RESJ) in the County. The proposed rent regulations would disproportionately benefit Black and Latinx tenants with improved housing affordability and stability. Further, the Bill systemically reinforces these benefits through establishing a permanent rent regulation program; creating new funding for affordable housing and the administration of the rent regulation program; and **including provisions aimed at preventing tenant displacement**.

Those summaries clarify the situation for you: Please resist the embarrassingly transparent pretense of taking action – Bill 15-23 – which is likely to backfire and actually push up the level of average rent increases. Instead, adopt the HOME Act (16-23), and take a serious, fair, practical step toward real social progress. All of us – the third of your constituents who rent their homes and the two-thirds of your constituents who own their homes – are counting on that kind of strong leadership from you to protect and expand the resilience and wellbeing of our entire community.

Colleen Cordes  
Takoma Park Resident