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Testimony in Support of the HOME Act (Bill 16-23), and In Opposition to the “Anti-Rent Gouging” Bill (Bill 15-23)

My name is Danielle Herrmann, and I am a resident of District 4, in Takoma Park. As a medical clinical social worker, I have witnessed the adverse effects of unstable housing and substandard housing conditions, disproportionately borne by our community’s most vulnerable individuals and families. The injurious impact has staggering consequences, especially for children, BIPOC, and members of low-income communities, as well as elders and those with disabilities. The National Association of Social Workers recognizes that adequate shelter – which, importantly, means stable shelter – is essential to a stable life, mental well-being, and health and safety.

As an immunocompromised senior citizen, this universal need hits close to home; my now-safe, stable housing is my lifeline. But I lived in dangerous conditions despite being a tenant in good standing, paying over \$25,000 in rent per year for a unit in a multi-family dwelling. All tenants were subjected to uncontrolled roaches, which, according to Pest Control, were the result of chronic basement flooding and structural leaks creating wall moisture and mold in units. During the winter we often had insufficient or no heat for days or even weeks. Some tenants used electric heaters 24/7, which put all tenants at risk of unintended injury and death. I tried for months to leave unsafe situation. But finding affordable housing as an elderly person with serious medical conditions during the pandemic, when there are no guardrails regarding the rising cost of rentals, has been a nightmare. The other tenants are faring no better by staying. They’re terrified of rent increases with no limits and fear retaliation if they speak up regarding the situation.

I also come to you as a social worker for whom navigating housing resources should be easy - at least, easier. Yet the search was arduous and exhausting. What type of community is Montgomery County creating if it does not address the suffering of those of us living with housing insecurity, which is even more pronounced for our county’s BIPOC, disabled, and low-income communities?

There is a movement of tenants and supporters demanding change. The HOME Act, by stabilizing rents at a maximum of 3%, changing reporting requirements for landlords, creating funding for affordable housing through its vacancy tax, and requiring transparency around landlord maintenance, would stabilize a housing market too precocious for even the most experienced to navigate. On the other hand, Bill 15-23 would codify and *incentivize* the very same instability that threatens the health of our county’s renters – almost half of our County!

I urge the Council to pass the HOME Act swiftly, and to full oppose Bill 15-23. Thank you.

