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Rockville (North Bethesda)

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF THE H.O.M.E ACT, BILL 16-23
AND IN OPPOSITION TO THE “ANTI-RENT-GOUGING” ACT, BILL 15-23**

My name is Deedee Jacobsohn and I live in North Bethesda, in County District 4. I am writing to urge the Council to **support Bill 16-23, the HOME Act**, and not to pass Bill 15-23, the “Anti-Rent-Gouging” act.

We already live in a county with a serious housing problem. When my children were in public school, their favorite teachers could not afford to live in the county and faced long commutes. Last spring, my synagogue hired a new rabbi and she struggled to find a place to rent when she moved here with her family. Even friends who are not cost-burdened are having to make adjustments because of significant rent increases (that fall below the cap proposed by the Anti-Rent-Gouging bill).

Over the past two years, I have spent a lot of time listening to people impacted by our housing crisis at all levels: I have canvassed renters, followed stories from housing-related press conferences, and attended county hearings (some live, some on zoom). One high school student said her part-time salary was needed to help cover the rent. A mother had to move her family into a one-bedroom because they couldn’t afford the rent on their two-bedroom, but at least her family was still able to stay in the same building. A grandmother with strong ties to church and community worries her fixed income will not cover another big rent increase.

I have heard that eviction cases are up; that there is not enough affordable housing; that people who get behind in rent end up leaving the county (with the help of DHHS). I have heard how precarious many of our families are, and how students without stable housing face cascading challenges and struggle in school.

Montgomery County must be better than this. Everyone deserves a safe, stable home.

Last month, I attended the council session to listen to the affordable housing panel convened by Council Vice President Andrew Friedson. There was lots of agreement about the need for affordable housing. Yet even some of the management companies’ own data didn’t seem to uphold their narrative about the evils of rent stabilization efforts.

Slides from the Southern Management Companies included an appendix with charts showing rent increases in 10 of their “Workforce Housing Communities.” The charts do not have uniform measurements which makes comparisons challenging, but in 2018 only two communities had increases >3% and <6%. In 2019, most communities had an increase of more than 3%; in four

communities the increase was <4%, in three the increases were >4% and <6%, and one had an increase of 10%. None of the data indicated an increase of more than 3% from 2020-2022.

Clearly, **a 3% cap in rent increases is not going to be an onerous burden on landlords or management companies.** Especially with the exemptions and exceptions provided by the HOME Act. Just look at the Voluntary Rent Guidelines: the average of all the recommended increases since 1993 is just 3.02%.

And what of the “Anti-Rent-Gouging” Act? Sure, it would curb the most extreme rent increases. But in the past thirty years the highest Voluntary Rent Guideline was 5.8% (where it is now, and where it was once before, in 2007). In previous hearings and testimonies, landlords claimed they typically abide by the voluntary guidelines. By legislating a cap at 8% **plus** CPI, this bill gives landlords legal permission to institute oppressive increases just up to the cap—higher than any recommended in the *voluntary* guidelines. Bill 15-23, in essence, legalizes rent gouging.

There are many measures needed to preserve and produce more affordable housing in our county. However, most of the measures will take time to have a noticeable impact. A lot of time. Rent stabilization is an important tool that will keep tenants housed immediately, especially our most vulnerable residents, and will provide much-needed stability moving forward. **I urge you to pass the HOME Act.**