

Sarah Brand-Wiita

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,

Thank you very much for holding these upcoming hearings, and thank you for giving us the opportunity to testify.

My name is Sarah Brand-Wiita. I am a Member of the Montgomery County Democratic Central Committee (At-Large), but I must specify that I am writing as a private individual, not for the Committee. I have a Bachelor's in Economics from Vanderbilt University and a Master's in Inequalities and Social Science from the London School of Economics.

I write to urge you in the strongest possible terms to support the HOME Act.

I am privileged to live in Montgomery County with secure housing. But people I love are, or have been, housing insecure. My husband, Zach Brand-Wiita, first moved to Montgomery County almost thirteen years ago. He spent nine years renting a room in a group home because he had to financially support his mother after she became disabled following a stroke. The group house in which he lived was infested at various times with cockroaches, mice, and rats; he couldn't even cook using an oven because theirs was broken. After we fell in love, he moved in with me and was able to find better work, and we married. But, well – I can't marry everyone in Montgomery County!

Nor was my husband's experience uncommon. I have two elderly friends whom I met through my church. Both are themselves disabled and living on fixed incomes, and they too must rent rooms in group houses. They too face potential health risks from poor maintenance by negligent landlords. And they do not have families to provide them with financial support.

I think of these stories when I hear about Bills 16-23 and 15-23. I worry about my friends, and I worry about all the other people living in precarious housing in our County.

Bill 15-23, as you know, would allow rent increases of 8% plus CPI. Last year, that was 6.5% – we're talking a 14.5% rent increase! And all I can think when I hear that is – what are families who can barely get by supposed to do if they get a 14.5% rent increase? Move into a group house? What are my friends living on a fixed income supposed to do – get a roommate for the tiny bedroom they can barely afford? What are they supposed to do?

What are they supposed to do?

The HOME Act is the best possible alternative. A maximum annual rent increase of 3% will keep renters in their homes while preserving the ability of landlords to support themselves, and it's consistent with modern economic research showing that rent stabilization is an effective way to prevent displacement.

I urge you: Pass the HOME Act and keep our neighbors housed.

Sincerely,



Sarah Brand-Wiita