

## Montgomery County Climate Coalition Members for the Housing Opportunity, Mobility and Equity (H.O.M.E.) Act

Council President Evan Glass  
Montgomery County Council  
100 Maryland Ave.  
Rockville, MD 20850

April 28, 2023

### **Re: Support the H.O.M.E. Act for Rent Stabilization – Bill 16-23**

Dear Council President Glass and Councilmembers,

We, the undersigned 13 organizations, work together under the umbrella of the MoCo Climate Coalition. The Coalition came together in 2021, with the goal of supporting and monitoring implementation of the County's Climate Action Plan. The members of the MoCo Climate Coalition are deeply concerned about the current effects of climate change on our community – the flooding, the unbearable heat, droughts, loss of biodiversity – and we seek to address the root causes of climate change as the only way we can adequately address it.

Because we see the need to address the root causes of climate change, the MoCo Climate Coalition holds climate justice principles at the heart of its agenda. Therefore, many of the member groups think it is very important to speak in support of this Council's move to address the urgent need for clean, safe, affordable housing in the County. Rent stabilization is a key immediate step towards that important broader goal. **The groups signed below support the H.O.M.E Act (Bill 16-23) as the rent stabilization bill most closely aligned with our values of equity and climate justice.**

We see housing as tied in to the County's climate goals in multiple ways:

- Adequate housing is essential to protect people from the ravages of flooding, mold, heat and pollution emergencies that climate disruption causes,
- Adequate housing for low-income people supports people's participation in the community-building actions that are crucial to Montgomery's full-fledged climate response.
- Building housing near work centers curbs greenhouse gas emissions.

In general, we support housing that strives for net-zero energy use, is transit oriented, and is located in safe, cool, walkable communities .

We support housing justice in the County – that is, a regulatory and business environment that provides decent housing as a human right of all county residents. A comprehensive approach to housing justice in Montgomery County must take the following into account:

- Renters need affordability, stability, and predictability.
- The County must work with the business sector to set in place strategies and actions that meet the housing needs of low-income residents, at a scale that will fully relieve housing burdens and eliminate housing insecurity.

- A comprehensive package of solutions is needed, including direct cash subsidies to rent-burdened tenants, avenues for tenants to become property owners, and supply side increases in housing availability.
- Housing justice also includes just cause eviction policies, effective “Right to Repair” for tenants, and whistleblower protection for renters who complain about unsafe and unhealthy conditions.

Examining the two bills introduced, we support the Housing Opportunity, Mobility and Equity Act, as we find it more equitable. In particular,

- We support limiting rent increases to CPI-U or something that is closer to the 3% cap. A cap of CPI-U plus 8% is very high; the Voluntary Rent Guideline was last set at 8% in 1983, with consistently much lower increases every year since then. This high level of increase does not seem necessary to continue to encourage landlords to rent and it could be a very big burden on many renters.
- Landlord maintenance of properties has been an issue in the County; the H.O.M.E. Act sets up a control that requires landlords to be fully compliant with their maintenance responsibilities before a waiver of the cap can be allowed.
- The Act imposes an excise tax on units held vacant, thereby prompting fuller use of the available housing stock.
- We recognize that both bills provide lengthy exemptions (10 and 15 years) for newly built housing. We would like to see more information to understand the need and what works best.
- We recognize that there is a provision in the H.O.M.E. Act that allows landlords to ‘bank’ a percentage point for use in future years. This seems reasonable.
- We recognize that some compromises between the two bills are likely and we welcome productive debate on key issues.

We urge that the final bill be made a part of a larger package of support for affordable housing. Such a package would include social support measures such as immediate rent relief when needed; funding for more affordable housing units, through increases for the Housing Production Fund to create “social housing;” more mechanisms for enforcing landlord responsibilities on property maintenance; and consideration of a living wage. Neither of the two bills currently includes all these features; we urge you to pass additional legislation or enact budget measures that build these features into the County’s housing framework.

In summary, climate justice is housing justice. For a sustainable, equitable, and vibrant future, the CAP Coalition members signed below support the H.O.M.E. Act, Bill 16-23.

**350 Montgomery County  
ACQ (Ask the Climate Question)  
Bethesda Green  
Biodiversity for a Livable Climate  
Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church,  
Environmental Justice Ministry  
Chesapeake Climate Action Network (CCAN)  
Elders Climate Action  
Glen Echo Heights Mobilization**

**Montgomery County Faith Alliance for Climate  
Solutions  
Takoma Park Mobilization Environment Committee  
TAME Coalition - Transit Alternatives to Mid-  
County Highway Extended/M-83  
The Climate Mobilization, Montgomery County  
Unitarian Universalist Church of Silver Spring,  
Green Sanctuary Committee  
Individual - Jim Driscoll**