

Jo_Shifrin_Bill # 16-23_Support
Hearing Date: March 28, 2023
Jo Shifrin
Bethesda, MD 20817

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF Bill # 16-23 The HOME Act

TO: Council President Glass, Vice President Friedson, and members of the County Council

FROM: Jo Shifrin

OPENING: My name is Jo Shifrin. I am a resident of Bethesda, in County District 1. I am submitting this testimony in support of Bill # 16-23, The HOME Act.

First, I'd like to thank Councilmembers Jawando and Mink who are sponsoring this bill.

I am a retiree, a Jew, and someone who has been interested in housing as a public health issue for years. There are many Jewish values that provide a moral framework within which we, as a society, should live. Two of these values are: 1) Treat people the way that you would want to be treated; and 2) try to make the world more fair and equitable, helping everyone to get what they need to live a safe and healthy life.

Stable and safe housing is a basic human right. It is a requirement for a healthy society and for reducing racial inequities. Montgomery County rents are extremely high. And allowing them to increase by 8% or 10% or more per year is a recipe for massive evictions. More than one third of the county's 1.1 million residents are renters and 50% of them are cost-burdened, spending 33% of their income or more on rent.

Economic instability –which was exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic– continues to threaten thousands of Montgomery County families. Emergency rental assistance had helped thousands of Montgomery County households to avoid eviction. However, now renters are once again struggling to regain economic self-sufficiency, but they are hampered by skyrocketing rents. With unemployment and underemployment still an issue, allowing rents to be increased substantially will only generate more evictions. Evictions mean:

- Children may not be able to continue their education in the same school
- Personal belongings –furniture, clothing, family treasures, etc.-- may be lost
- Homelessness will increase, leading to a rise in health problems in the community

The HOME Act, Bill #16-23, will provide us with rent stabilization, an annual limit on rent increases. While limiting those annual increases to a more manageable and predictable amount, it will still allow landlords to apply for rent increases above the annual limit for capital improvements. This bill protects developers by exempting new construction, and exempts

deeply affordable housing and places of worship. Bill #16-23 will allow renters to plan for increases. The bill will reduce the number of families who face evictions, displacement, and homelessness, thereby improving the health and well-being of children, families, the disabled, and those on a fixed income. And it will fund the construction and/or preservation of affordable housing, something this county needs a lot more of.

I urge the County Council to support Bill #16-23.