


Carol Stern



RE: Public Hearing for Bill 15-23 - Funding for DHCA Rent Stabilization

Dear Montgomery County Council:

As a resident of Montgomery County, a member of the Jews United for Justice Montgomery County Leadership Council and a member of Adat Shalom Reconstructionist Congregation in Bethesda, I support the special appropriation to the FY24 budget for \$1,347,470. This funding is needed to establish a new Rent Stabilization Office and create the information technology infrastructure needed to implement the rent stabilization bill (Bill 15-23).

Rent stabilization is an immediate solution to stopping the drastic rent increases that cause displacement of our most marginalized neighbors, while still allowing rents to increase for such things as taxes and inflation. Rent stabilization puts into law what my Jewish values have taught me, that we are obligated to protect the most vulnerable in our society. Our sacred texts recognize that having safe, stable housing is key to a healthy society, and we know that it is key to reducing racial inequities. We believe housing is a human right and funding the rent stabilization bill is crucial to its full and immediate implementation. Unfortunately, landlords are already taking advantage of the implementation timeline to increase rents too much.

It's important to remember that when the bill was discussed and passed, a majority of the council supported DHCA Director Scott Bruton's vision for the department. He explained that new personnel and systems are necessary to enforce rent stabilization in the county. This special appropriation represents the funding requested by Director Bruton to hire the staff and build the critically important IT infrastructure. These new systems are absolutely necessary to handle the additional reporting and enforcement activities that are essential to the smooth roll-out of rent stabilization. The new department will have many responsibilities including enforcing compliance with the regulations, managing tenants complaints and the application and appeals process for landlord exemption petitions. These funds would also enable DHCA to develop an online website related to all rent stabilization matters and a portal for landlords to report mandated rent increase data.

We all want rent stabilization to be successful for tenants and landlords, and it's only through this funding that the program can be created to handle our community's needs. Rent stabilization is a crucial piece of making sure that the thousands of renters in our County are not forced out of their homes or worse forced to move out of Montgomery County.

I urge the Council to pass the special appropriation to the FY24 budget for \$1,347,470 to establish a new Rent Stabilization Office (Bill 15-23).

Sincerely,

Carol Stern