



COMMISSION ON AGING

February 21, 2018

The Honorable Shane Pendergrass
House Office Building, Room 241
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: HB 556

Dear Delegate Pendergrass:

I am writing to express the Montgomery County Commission on Aging's support for HB 556, which authorizes the Register of Wills to waive probate fees in certain circumstances where an heir to an estate comprised only of real property cannot afford to probate that estate in order to transfer title to the property.

Most higher-income families engage in estate planning, which ensures a smooth transfer of wealth, including title to real property, to the next generation. In contrast, lower-income property owners or those with less access to the legal system are more likely to use a simple will to divide property among children, or to die without a will. The situation becomes complex when there are multiple heirs, across more than one generation. It is even more complicated when the heirs are unable to probate the estate and transfer the property into their name because they cannot afford the required fees.

This situation can lead to various scenarios. The property may be abandoned and a blight on a community. Heirs may not receive property tax and water bills sent to the owner of record, which could result in delinquencies and potential tax sales. The Maryland Association of Counties cited situations like this one in its support for this bill.

The Commission on Aging is particularly concerned with another scenario, in which an heir to an estate may reside on the property for years, dutifully paying the taxes and utilities and maintaining the premises. As she ages, her income may be reduced and her health may decline, making her less able to pay the taxes and manage upkeep of the home. Since she does not have title to the property, she cannot take advantage of property tax credit, home repair, or other programs that could help her to remain safely in her home and community. The fee waiver provided by HB 556 will help her to do so.

Thank you for your consideration of the Commission on Aging's support for this bill.

Sincerely,

Isabelle Schoenfeld, Chair
Commission on Aging

cc:: Delegate Charles Sydnor
Montgomery County Delegation

Department of Health and Human Services

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