



MONTGOMERY HOUSING ALLIANCE

www.montgomeryhousingalliance.org

A coalition of organizations focused on increasing the rate of preservation and development of affordable housing in Montgomery County

TESTIMONY ON BILL 44-20, HUMAN RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES – RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE ADVISORY COMMITTEE – MEMBERS – AMENDMENTS

Montgomery Housing Alliance

October 20, 2020

Good afternoon Council President Katz and members of the Council. My name is Mary Kolar, and I am testifying on behalf of Montgomery Housing Alliance. MHA is a coalition of organizations focused on increasing the rate of affordable housing preservation and development in Montgomery County. MHA members include non-profit developers, organizations that serve people in need of affordable housing, and other groups who count affordable housing as one of their policy goals.

MHA strongly supports Bill 44-20, especially the proposed requirement for a racial equity and social justice impact statement for each new zoning text amendment. We commend Councilmember Navarro for introducing this important legislation and the full Council for unanimously sponsoring the bill.

As affordable housing providers and advocates, MHA members recognize the way zoning decisions crucially impact low-income residents and communities of color. Throughout the country, zoning and land use policies often have, whether intentionally or unintentionally, been used to advantage certain populations, while disadvantaging others. Montgomery County is no exception. In particular, zoning decisions have historically impacted housing outcomes and contributed to segregated neighborhoods. Residential segregation results in inequitable access to many important aspects of residential life, including healthcare, transportation, schools, healthy food options, and parks and recreation facilities. Housing discrimination and segregation leads to deeply negative outcomes for low-income households and households of color – especially African American households. There persists a dramatic gap between homeownership rates for African American families and white families. In fact, the African American homeownership rate is as low as it was 50 years ago. This impacts African American families' ability to benefit from home equity, and has generational impacts: children of homeowners experience better health, education, and earnings outcomes. Equitable zoning policies are critical in order to provide all County residents equal access to opportunities.

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As the County strives to deliberately address institutional inequities, issues of housing must be at the forefront. Zoning policies are a critical factor in furthering housing justice. Instituting inclusive policies that foster development of high quality, affordable units across the entire continuum of housing in all communities is an effective way to address racial and economic inequities that persist in the County.

Again, we applaud the Council's efforts to build a more inclusive and equitable Montgomery County. Bill 44-20 is an important step towards the goal.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input as you consider this matter.

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