

Jews United for Justice (JUFJ)

Mike English

Silver Spring, MD

www.jufj.org

**JEWES UNITED
FOR JUSTICE**

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JUFJ Official Testimony In Support With Amendments

Bill 26-21: Taxation - Payments in Lieu of Taxes - Affordable Housing Amendments

My name is Mike English, I'm a resident of District 5, and I am testifying in support with amendments on Bill 26-21 on behalf of Jews United for Justice.

The Mishneh Torah, a foundational Jewish legal text, states that a house must "be made as a place for people to live. It must be made as an honorable place. It must be made as a permanent place." Our neighbors in search of affordable housing deserve more than temporary shelter - they deserve honorable, permanent homes in which to live.

Bill 26-21 would facilitate the construction of nonprofit, affordable housing by reinstating the County's previous practice of automatically granting a payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT) to all nonprofit housing developers, to aid in meeting construction costs. This change will save nonprofit providers time, cost, and uncertainty. By formally mandating the granting of a PILOT to qualifying projects, Bill 26-21 will not only make development of a particular proposal more predictable for non-profit providers, but will provide them with more certainty that the administrative practices of the County will not change suddenly as they make multi-year plans for critical housing initiatives.

Bill 26-21 will also help minimize the spending of funds from the Housing Initiative Fund (HIF) on County property taxes, a practice increasingly prevalent since the recent shift in Department of Housing and Community Affairs (DHCA) policy. HIF funds would be better spent on the investment, development, and maintenance of more affordable units.

As other advocates have requested, we ask that the Council ensure that the PILOT not terminate after the 15-year minimum, but rather continue for as long as affordability is maintained on any given project.

And in agreement with the Coalition for Smarter Growth, we similarly propose an amendment specifying that any nonprofit eligible to receive a PILOT for 100% of property taxes must have at least 60% affordable units, instead of the current 50% affordable units. We believe this strikes a strong balance between providing the greatest number of affordable units possible and ensuring that affordable units will be built and will welcome diverse income levels.

We believe this bill will help our County improve racial and economic equity in housing, as this bill encourages the construction of housing that will be affordable to more people of diverse backgrounds and economic circumstances. However, we recognize that even within non-profit housing, there can be racial disparities in who gets housed and the living conditions residents encounter. Continued vigilance in the reform of our County's housing policies is still needed. We ask that the Council seriously consider the recommendations of the Office of Legislative Oversight's Racial Equity and Social Justice Impact statement on this bill once it is released.

We look forward to working with the council and its staff to make this legislation the best it can be, and to help foster additional legislation that will further address the dire housing crisis in our County.

Thank you,

Mike English
Silver Spring, MD