

Howard County Council Testimony
January 20, 2026

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Bill CB3 - 2026

Good Evening, Council members. I am Deborah Clutts, a 43-year resident of Howard County. I am also the mother of an adult son, Matthew, born and raised in Columbia, who is on the Autism Spectrum. Howard County's housing shortage affects many residents, but its consequences fall disproportionately on people with disabilities. In a county where roughly one in seven adults lives with a disability, accessible and affordable housing options remain extremely scarce. Housing Choice Voucher waitlists stretch for years, accessible units are routinely leased within hours, and many residents are left with no real choices at all.

For too many people with disabilities, the lack of housing options means being pushed into unsafe housing, frequent moves, or institutional settings — not because of need, but because of policy constraints which negatively impact available and affordable housing. That is not a failure of individual circumstances; it is a failure of our housing system.

Accessory Dwelling Units, or ADUs, offer a practical and immediate way to address this gap. ADUs expand housing choices within existing neighborhoods, where a person with a disability can be close to transit, services, and social supports, which is exactly where people with disabilities want and need to live.

Independent living is a core value of the disability community. ADUs support that goal by offering private, self-contained homes that allow people to live autonomously while remaining near family members or caregivers when desired. This flexibility is especially important in Howard County, where most housing stock consists of older single-family homes that are difficult and expensive to retrofit for accessibility.

ADUs also create real opportunities for accessible design. Small, ground-level units can be built with universal design features from the outset, often at far lower cost than modifying an existing home or competing for one of the very few accessible and affordable apartments available countywide. Allowing detached ADUs and approving them by right gives homeowners the predictability they need to make those investments.

ZRA-218 removes unnecessary barriers while preserving neighborhood character. It expands housing choice without large-scale development and without public subsidy. For people with disabilities, this is not a technical zoning matter, it's about dignity, independence, and the right to live safely in the community of one's choosing.

I urge you to support ZRA-218 and take this meaningful step toward a more inclusive Howard County. Thank you for your consideration.

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The People's Voice -

Testimony on CB3 – 2026 – Support with Amendment

The People's Voice has actually requested the equivalent of allowing ADU's for almost 10 years . We do believe they can be beneficial and provide more affordable rental units and even help people stay in their homes as they age, with more income and ability to have caretakers live on site but independently.

The State Bill requiring more ease of doing ADU's clearly allows local jurisdictions to add restriction as they feel are necessary, specifically noting the areas of parking and infrastructure needs. Thus, CB3 is not simply a compliance Bill, as it goes farther by allowing ADU's as a matter of right, and not just in single-family detached zones, and also allows 2-family i.e. duplexing of single units across many zones.

The amendments we believe are needed to this legislation are twofold. One is to require that with duplexing OR ADU's OR both, that owner occupancy of the main residence be required with building and renting. Adding these zoning allowances across these residential zones, especially if done as 3 to 1, will add great value to homes, so sales affordability is not going to be helped. Therefore, it is very important that we make every attempt to get more rental affordability, which has been the stated goal. In order to achieve that, it must be owner-occupied, otherwise investors will be far too enticed to buy up homes, making 1 into 3 and then we will not see the lower rents that homeowners investing in this would provide. This also has a great affect on how many will occur in a localized fashion as predicted by DPZ.

In the Bill, on page 42 line 9 and 10 there seems to be some errors. The "accessory apartment" notation in the first part of the first sentence on line 9 is not changed where requiring owner occupancy, and it still says "within" instead of within or detached, which needs to be the new language. That firms up owner occupancy for ADU's, but the duplexing part should also be owner-occupied to build or rent.

Secondly, the Bill should add these uses as conditional uses. It is not a good idea for the County to give up all control over where all this could happen in a localized way with cumulative impacts that are not being taken fully into consideration at present. The County needs to preserve some planning ability as to any possible need to address overwhelming certain roads, storm water needs, or other regional issues.

We could always do something to speed and ease the ADU conditional process. Possibly the County could charge less for that conditional use process, or even hasten it. The State requirements allow restrictions that could be abided by in criteria for the use being granted. That would retain some County input into the process going forward. If an owner can afford to build these units, even the current fee is not a hardship. Although fees and delays could be controlled. Property values and ability to finance will be increased by these zoning changes as well.

The County should keep some control of ever being able to cap or plan for ADU's and duplexing across a wide variety of neighborhoods that have ingress/egress, parking, storm water, and other differences. ADU's and duplexes can provide more middle income rentals and help homeowners too, but only if we figure out a productive but conditional process and require owner occupancy. We should not just wait for problems to happen then try to address them, as homeowners would have been given the matter of right use, then it would be taken away? That could be problematic. We should set things up for productive planning up front.

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It is also important to implement good licensing and permitting for rentals, including short-term, airbnb type rental issues. The State Bill says short-term rentals are not to be restricted, but could be overseen well, as they are in Montgomery County where inspections and permitting issues are detailed.

Another question I recently saw was whether the ADU will be considered an addition or not in construction, and would the lower building fee of \$1.32 per square foot apply? The lower square footage is not the only definer of that lower fee. It also needs to be defined as an addition. The code currently reads addition -to a building- in definitions, so detached construction seems not to apply. Something to consider when weighing a conditional use cost decision as well.

Thank you,

Lisa Markovitz

President, The People's Voice

Good evening Council members,

My name is Ryan Powers from Glenwood, and I am testifying on behalf of the Howard County Citizens Association.

HCCA supports CB3-2026, but we want to emphasize that the need for housing growth should be balanced with infrastructure investment such as affordable water, affordable sewer, schools that are well maintained, open space and recreation at the same per capita level, not to mention keeping police, fire, and EMS response times the same . As such, HCCA is in general support of CB3's Accessory Dwelling Unit legislation but questions why duplexes by right are part of this bill when they weren't mentioned in County Executive Ball's press releases

We want to acknowledge the excellent job the Department of Planning and Zoning did presenting ZRA-218 to community groups as well as outreach with their own event. Director Eisenberg answered at least 36 questions during HCCA's virtual discussion, after giving a presentation explaining the bill. We believe the Planning Board heard more from residents because of this and ultimately recommended keeping the owner-occupancy requirement for ADUs due to resident engagement. Finally, we'd like to thank County Executive Ball for following through with this recommendation and also keeping the two bedroom maximum.

While we appreciate these changes, we also have amendments we'd like the council to pursue.

1) With the intention of this bill to expand both the number and types of housing units in the county, we believe that a second look at infrastructure impacts should be done. For example, the school impact fee is an incredibly low 1.32 per sq ft for additional construction of additions less than 2000ft. We suggest impact fees should be more aligned with the intention of this bill and how people are living today. The median home size in Howard County is ~2100 sq ft. When CB58-2022 was put in place the average size of homes on the market was closer to 3000 sq ft. We are concerned an unknown number of additional housing units won't pay for additional infrastructure needs created by them.

2) This legislation also needs to clarify APFO restrictions on ADU's. Director Eisenberg has confirmed state law does not prohibit APFO restrictions on ADU's, so it makes little sense not to include them. Although ADU's don't involve the subdivision and site plan process, new legislation needs to account for a new type of housing.

3) Duplexes on single-family lots should remain a conditional use. This legislation sets a minimum lot size of 16,000 sq ft, $\frac{1}{3}$ of an acre, for potentially two housing units plus an ADU. The Department of Planning can tell us that bulk restrictions will limit this, or, given the variety of lot shapes, neighborhoods, roads conditions, traffic, and other external factors, the council can continue to make sure Howard County has the best plan for residential growth. There are also concerns that no owner-occupancy requirement for these duplexes will lead to what should be home ownership opportunities instead becoming investor-owned rentals.

And finally,

4) HCCA believes there's a technical error in the bill. The Administration has indicated that it wants this bill to retain owner-occupancy requirements for ADU's. It appears the actual owner-occupancy requirement is from a vestigial part of the prior language discussing accessory apartments, which no longer exist due to their replacement in this bill with accessory dwelling units (Page 42, Lines 9-11)

Thank you,

Ryan Powers, HCCA board member