

Good Evening Members of the Howard County Council, my name is Connor Gephart, and I live in Ellicott City and District 1.

I am testifying tonight as a member of the Howard County Rent Stabilization Coalition, and I have been a tenant in Howard County for a year and a half and I hope to make it many more to come. However, the cost of living, specifically rent, is increasing at a rate that cannot be allowed to continue.

I am testifying tonight on CB44, and while I am pleased to see that some sort of action is being taken to try to address rising rent costs in Howard County, this bill as currently proposed does not go nearly far enough to truly provide any meaningful protections to tenants like myself. For that reason, the bill needs many strengthening amendments to make it worthwhile.

I decided to testify on this issue because it affects me every single month. Every month, my partner and I pay \$2500 to a man we barely know and have only met in person twice. Sometimes he comes to fix the problems we have, sometimes he chooses not to. And we just have to trust this man to not raise our rent to whatever he feels every year? I am worried about the future stability of my housing because I cannot predict what my landlord will do, and that puts unnecessary stress on myself and my partner. Again, I am happy that any legislation has been introduced to combat this problem that many members of our community face, but CB44 does not go far enough to protect tenants.

I am proud of the Howard County Rent Stabilization Coalition, which has put out a strong model for what would provide reasonable protections for tenants like myself: a permanent bill that covers all tenants, and caps rent increases at no more than 3% in a single year. Beyond that, it leaves out significant groups of tenants, including those who live in affordable housing, non-profit housing and nursing homes, and those who live in housing owned by “small landlords”. As far as I can tell, I am in one of those “small landlord” situations, and I do not see why I should have to be subject to random rent increases just because my landlord is a singular person who had enough money to buy a second house. Similarly, CB44 as proposed would also

not apply Rent Stabilization to units the first 20 years that they're built, which alone will leave out over 30% of tenants in the County.

I am also extremely disappointed that this bill has an expiration date. CB44 will expire after the year 2027, which will once again leave tenants like myself unprotected against large rent increases. How useful is a bill that would prevent my landlord from increasing my rent for 4 or 5 years, if he can then go and increase it by 4 or 5 times the rate he was legally allowed to within those years.

I want to love living in this county, and I think there are things here that make it a great place to be. I want this to be a strong bill that we can use as an example to our neighboring counties, and even neighboring states, to show that we care about everyone in our community and that we care to make sure they are welcome here. To do so I strongly recommend all council members to amend CB44 to be a permanent bill, cap rent increases at 3%, and make it a bill that covers all tenants in the county.

Thank you for your time and I hope to see some great changes to this bill.

Good Evening Members of the Council,

My name is Jessica Nichols, the President of the Columbia Democratic Club, I am testifying on behalf of the Columbia Democratic Club in our capacity as members of the living wage coalition. and I am here today to express my club's strong support for Howard County Council Bill CB-44. Our Club believes this bill represents a healthy compromise that addresses the concerns of both renters and those invested in the growth and development of our community. We believe that it strikes a crucial balance between the short-term needs of renters and the long-term goal of fostering responsible building and development.

As we all recognize, the issue of rent gouging is a pressing concern for many residents in Howard County. CB-44 takes a significant step toward protecting renters from unjust rent increases without stifling the much-needed development in our community. This balance is vital for maintaining a thriving and inclusive environment for all.

Council members, during the General Plan hearings, you had the opportunity to hear the voices of the neediest members of our community. Their pleas for relief should resonate with all of us, compelling us to take action that ensures their well-being. CB-44 is a tangible way to address these concerns and provide much-needed support to those who are most vulnerable.

Additionally, it's evident that our community is facing a housing crisis with demand far exceeding the available supply. Rising rents and housing prices pose a significant challenge, and we must respond with a commitment to building more housing. CB-44 recognizes this urgency and supports the growth necessary to meet the needs of our residents.

I would also like to highlight the proposal within CB-44 to establish three new positions for a permanent landlord/tenant affairs division. This is a crucial and much-needed improvement for Howard County renters. A dedicated division will provide ongoing support and ensure that the rights and concerns of both landlords and tenants are addressed in a fair and timely manner. This permanent solution aligns with the vision of a thriving and harmonious community that we all aspire to build.

In conclusion, I urge the Council to support Howard County Council Bill CB-44. By doing so, we can strike a balance between the immediate needs of our community members

and the long-term goals of responsible development. Let us work together to create a Howard County that is both equitable and compassionate.

Thank you for your time and dedication to the well-being of our community.

Sincerely,

Jessica Nichols

Written Testimony: CB 44-2023 (rent control and other housing related provisions)

Good evening, members of the Howard County Council. My name is Leif Powers, and I live in Columbia, District 4, near Howard County General Hospital. Today, I wish to report and advise on CB44-2023, on the matter of the proposed rent controls.

I have lived here for more than a decade. Initially, I paid roughly \$1200 per month for a one-bedroom apartment; currently, that apartment is around roughly \$1650 per month. The yearly increases are far below the proposed limits. Reviewing listings, comparable apartments cost about as much, suggesting that my situation is typical.

If the proposed rent control likely has no direct impact, who cares? The developers and housing operators care, because they have seen the history of cities imposing additional rent controls over time. (show Wall Street Journal article, 20 November 2023, "Signature's Loans To Sell at Discount", Peter Grant) New York state 2019 rent control changes are a major contributor to valuation losses of up to 70%. This is on top of a downturn in apartment rental business (show Wall Street Journal article, 22 November 2023, "Houses Too Costly to Buy Underpin Jump in Rents", Will Parker). By contrast, single family home values and rents are greatly increasing. Investors in apartment buildings in a blue state in 2024, likely are donating to a charity operation; economically rational housing operators will let their properties deteriorate and become slums, as they have in New York City and the Bay Area.

Two weeks ago, I drove all over California – LA, San Diego, the Bay Area. Everywhere, I saw small, single-family homes. If the political will to increase density and moderate housing costs exists, it can be done. Market pricing will maintain the existing housing. The worst option is to impose rent controls, which restrict housing supply and lower housing quality.

I advise you to sever the rent control parts from the rest of the bill, which has some positive changes.

Thank you and have a lovely evening. :)