

Chair Jones, Vice-Chair Rigby, Members Walsh, Jung, and Yungmann, good evening. My name is Kelly Klinefelter, I live in Columbia, and I am the president of the Howard Progressive Project. I am here this evening to testify on behalf of HPP against CB-9.

Howard Progressive Project's central organizing principle is community. We envision a more just and equitable Howard County, a place where every person can grow to their fullest potential.

Our work for social, racial, and economic justice in Howard County is urgent because, while this county is consistently recognized as one of the wealthiest, most-educated in the nation, one in four of us struggles to make ends meet every month and there is an egregious lack of affordable housing.

We believe that CB-9 puts even more obstacles than those that already exist into place for the construction of affordable housing in Howard County.

As currently written, CB-9 would effectively remove from the county council the ability to consider affordable housing projects in the county, by shifting the burden to the board of education and placing requirements on APFO applicants that are impossible to achieve, thereby undermining the very purpose for which APFO was passed in the first place. APFO is designed to allow the county council to consider the specifics of individual affordable housing proposals. The blanket requirements in this bill as currently written would delay and deny projects that provide both the refurbishment of existing affordable homes and the construction of sorely needed new affordable homes regardless of their individual merit.

CB-9 would also overburden an already stressed school planning office, whose job is not zoning and planning, forcing them into a role the county council is elected to fill.

According to the 2018 Howard County Rental Survey, a shortage of over 5000 affordable housing units existed four years ago. And what have we done since 2018 to address our shortage in affordable housing?

Low income housing proposals come before the county council in small numbers, about 100 units at a time, unit numbers that would generate twenty or thirty students to a school. Since its inception, APFO has only been used three times, to approve affordable housing units adding a total of 75 students to our school system.

But some of our leaders have suggested that the quality of the education offered in our schools declines because of the addition of a handful of students. Can it really be possible that our school system of 57,000 students is going to collapse under the addition of twenty or thirty more students from the building of an affordable housing project?

We are creating a false choice here, a choice between affordable housing and schools, in order to make it easier to say no to the affordable housing that we know we need. But we cannot look to our public school system – the very institution that takes on many of the supports of inadequately housed children – to be the arbiter of affordable housing development. And as a teacher, I'll share this – no one who's worked in a school will ever testify against a child having a safe, warm place to live.

As one of the wealthiest counties in the wealthiest nation in the world, during a pandemic, with inflation rising, we are in no position to put even more obstacles up to affordable housing than already exist in Howard County. Please vote against CB-9. Thank you.