

Good evening Chair Rigby, Vice-Chair Jung, Members Jones, Walsh, and Yungmann. My name is Kelly Klinefelter. I am the president of Howard Progressive Project, the chair of the Living Wage Howard County coalition, and a resident of Columbia in District 4. I am here tonight to express HPP's support of CB-44.

For much too long, we've made collective housing policy choices in this county that have led us to a place of housing scarcity. As a result, we've got housing prices that are unrealistic for the average working family. Our teachers, our cops, our firefighters, our pandemic frontline workers – they're largely priced out of living in the community in which they serve. And a staggering number of our neighbors are forced to choose each month

between paying the rent or the mortgage and putting food on the table. Forty-five percent of our people who rent their homes spend more than 30% of their income on rent, and a staggering 50% of our neighbors spend more than 50% of their income on rent. This is happening in the wealthiest county in the wealthiest state in the United States of America. We have a moral obligation to act on behalf of our neighbors who teach us and protect us, who clean our classrooms and hospital rooms, make our restaurants meals, deliver our takeout, and brew our lattes.

CB-44 has the potential to make a difference in the lives of so many of our students, as well. Over the summer, I testified multiple times about the May 2023 HCPSS homelessness statistics. Since May, that number has risen

from 548 to over 800. And I've shared with you multiple times the stories of my students who work at night and on the weekends, 40 hours a week on top of their full-time high school schedules, to help their families pay the rent.

This persists.

Council, you know that Howard County renters have suffered precipitous rent increases in recent years. We've heard renters' voices at recent hearings. In fact, the average cost of rent has risen by 23% over the last three years, outpacing local wage increases.

At the same time as we need to control rent gouging in the short term, we need more housing. Rents are so high because demand so grossly exceeds supply. Between 2018 and 2021, the vacancy rate for rental apartments

dropped from 3.1% to 1.5%, which is far below the recommended vacancy rate of 5% that indicates a stable and healthy rental market. Folks are knocking at the door of Howard County to live here AND pay income AND property taxes here. We need to build more rental housing and we need to exercise caution – we don't want to create bills that stop housing growth.

We at HPP believe this bill is a healthy compromise that protects renters from rent gouging while not stifling the building that we so desperately need. A short-term/long-term balance has to be achieved, and we believe this bill does just that.

This rent stabilization bill has several features which make it a uniquely good innovation for our community. The three

new positions for the permanent landlord/tenant affairs division is an important improvement for our renters.

Additionally, the structures built into section 2 of the bill that require reflection and study will guarantee that we are striking the right short-term/long-term balance between alleviating rent-gouging while still encouraging the building of the rental units we so desperately need.

Thank you, council, for the work you do for Howard County.