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Judicial Proceedings Committee
Maryland Senate
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership SUPPORT for SB 937 Landlord and Tenant – Residential Leases – Prospective Tenant Criminal History Records Check (Maryland Fair Chance Housing Act)

Dear Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership (BRHP), I'm writing to express our support for SB 937, a critical measure to ensure that our returning Maryland residents are given an equitable opportunity to secure housing.

BRHP is a non-profit organization that expands housing choices for low-income families who have historically been excluded from housing in well-resourced neighborhoods by helping them access and transition successfully to safe, healthy, and economically vibrant communities. As the Regional Administrator for the Baltimore Housing Mobility Program, BRHP currently provides over 4,300 low-income families rental assistance in the form of Housing Choice Vouchers coupled with counseling support for families as they move from areas of concentrated poverty to areas of opportunity in Baltimore City and the five surrounding counties.

Safe and stable housing is critical for people exiting incarceration as it serves as a foundation to obtain other critical needs such as employment and family reunification.¹ Currently, individuals with criminal records often face significant and unnecessary barriers to securing safe and stable housing, putting their ability to be successful following incarceration at serious risk. People with criminal records are often denied housing, even for records that are years—even decades—old. A criminal

¹ Demelza Baer, Avinash Bhati, Lisa Brooks, et al., Understanding the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry: Research Findings from the Urban Institute's Prisoner Reentry Portfolio (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2006), 8–9, <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/42981/411289-Understanding-the-Challenges-of-Prisoner-Reentry.PDF>

record has no bearing on tenancy outcomes, and denying people with conviction histories housing undermines public safety and contributes to the cycle of justice system involvement, homelessness, and housing insecurity.² Housing stability is a key factor in reducing recidivism and promoting long-term success for returning citizens.

These barriers disproportionately impact Black and low-income individuals, further exacerbating systemic inequities. Black people make up 32 percent of the state's population, yet they make up nearly 71 percent of the state's jail and prison population.³ SB 937 addresses this harm by ensuring that those who have already been discriminated against do not become homeless after release because of institutional racism in the criminal justice system.

Passage of SB 937 is important now more than ever due to the federal stripping of fair housing protections the Trump Administration has undertaken in the past year. The Obama and Biden Administrations, in the desire to broaden housing accessibility for all, issued guidance that prospective tenants should not be denied based solely on arrest records and that application approval policies should accurately distinguish between “criminal conduct that indicates a demonstrable risk to resident safety and/or property and criminal conduct that does not.” Further, these memorandums outlined that denying an applicant for their criminal history may be a pretext for unequal treatment of individuals because of their race, color, national origin, disability, or another protected characteristic.⁴⁵ On November 25, 2025, the Trump Administration's Department of Housing and Urban Development rescinded both of these memorandums, reverting to guidance from the early 1990s.⁶ Maryland needs to step up and provide ongoing protections for residents in the light of these federal rollbacks.

² Daniel K. Malone, “Assessing Criminal History as a Predictor of Future Housing Success for Homeless Adults with Behavioral Health Disorders,” *Psychiatric Services* 60, no. 2 (2009), 224–230, 227–229, <https://perma.cc/8ASPC98U>. See also Calvin Johnson, “Tenant Screening with Criminal Background Checks: Predictions and Perceptions Are Not Causality,” *Edge: Office of Policy Development and Research*, May 17, 2022, <https://perma.cc/ZX8E-M4Y8>.; Lucius Couloute, *Nowhere to Go: Homelessness Among Formerly Incarcerated People* (Northampton, MA: Prison Policy Initiative, 2018), <https://perma.cc/T7R7-JEUB>

³ <https://trends.vera.org/state/MD>

⁴ https://www.novoco.com/documents/97930/hud_ogc_guide_fha_040416.pdf

⁵ <https://www.fairhousingnc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/06-10-2022-Implementation-of-OGC-Guidance-on-Application-of-FHA-Standards-to-the-Use-of-Criminal-Records-June-10-2022.pdf>

⁶ [https://www.novoco.com/public-media/documents/hud-criminal-screening-11262025.pdf?utm_source=NLIHC+All+Subscribers&utm_campaign=a783ddb168-Memo_120825&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-41cf60b129-&ct=t\(Memo_120825\)](https://www.novoco.com/public-media/documents/hud-criminal-screening-11262025.pdf?utm_source=NLIHC+All+Subscribers&utm_campaign=a783ddb168-Memo_120825&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-41cf60b129-&ct=t(Memo_120825))

SB 937 is a critical step toward ensuring fair housing opportunities by (1) giving prospective tenants fair consideration when trying to find a home, (2) reducing recidivism rates in Maryland thereby increasing public safety, and (3) giving many more Marylanders the opportunity to pursue career and educational opportunities that they might otherwise be limited in obtaining due to limited housing opportunities for people with a criminal history.

For these reasons, BRHP strongly urges a favorable report on SB 937. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Adria Crutchfield
Executive Director