

In Support of HB1077

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410 Dunkirk Rd., Baltimore, MD 21212

Dear Chair and members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee:

In 1910, a Yale-educated black lawyer bought a home in Mount Royal, so Baltimore City passed an ordinance that no black person could occupy a home on a block if more than half the block was white, and no white person could occupy a home on a block if more than half the block was black. When the courts overturned the ordinance, the city had its building and health department inspectors issue code violations against owners who ignored the illegal ordinance. Following was the birth of restrictive covenants in Baltimore. To further support restrictive covenants, the Federal Housing Administration, started in 1934 by Congress “to promote homeownership by insuring private mortgages,” failed to establish a nondiscrimination policy. Instead, the agency reflected “the racist tradition of the United States. It insisted on a rigid, white-black separation in housing. It openly supported racist covenants that largely excluded African-Americans — even the middle class and well-to-do — from the homeownership boom that took place between the 1930s and the 1960s. And it typically denied mortgages to black residents wherever they lived” (Kenneth Jackson, [Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States](#)).

Also in 1934, Keelty began building new homes in Rodgers Forge, which included restrictive covenants. I live in the 400 block of Dunkirk Road and my home was built in 1939. My covenants state:

[B]y the acceptance of this lease the James Keelty Realty Corporation aforesaid for itself its successors and assigns covenants and agrees with the said James Keelty Inc its successors and assigns to observe keep and perform to wit...8 At no time shall the lots of ground or the buildings described or erected thereon by occupied by any negro or person of negro extraction” (Liber 1047, pages 371-372, 112877).

Requiring communities to pay fees to remove racist language from their covenants is a double punishment. Do not penalize communities for trying to right the wrongs of our ancestors. While this may be mostly a symbolic gesture, passing this bill will allow us to acknowledge our history and work to repair the damage it has caused to generations of Marylanders.

Thank you,
Karen Rodriguez
President, Rodgers Forge Community Association