

PARITY

SB782 State Department of Assessments and Taxation – Real Property Assessments and Appeals

February 19th, 2021
Budget and Taxation Committee

To Whom It May Concern:

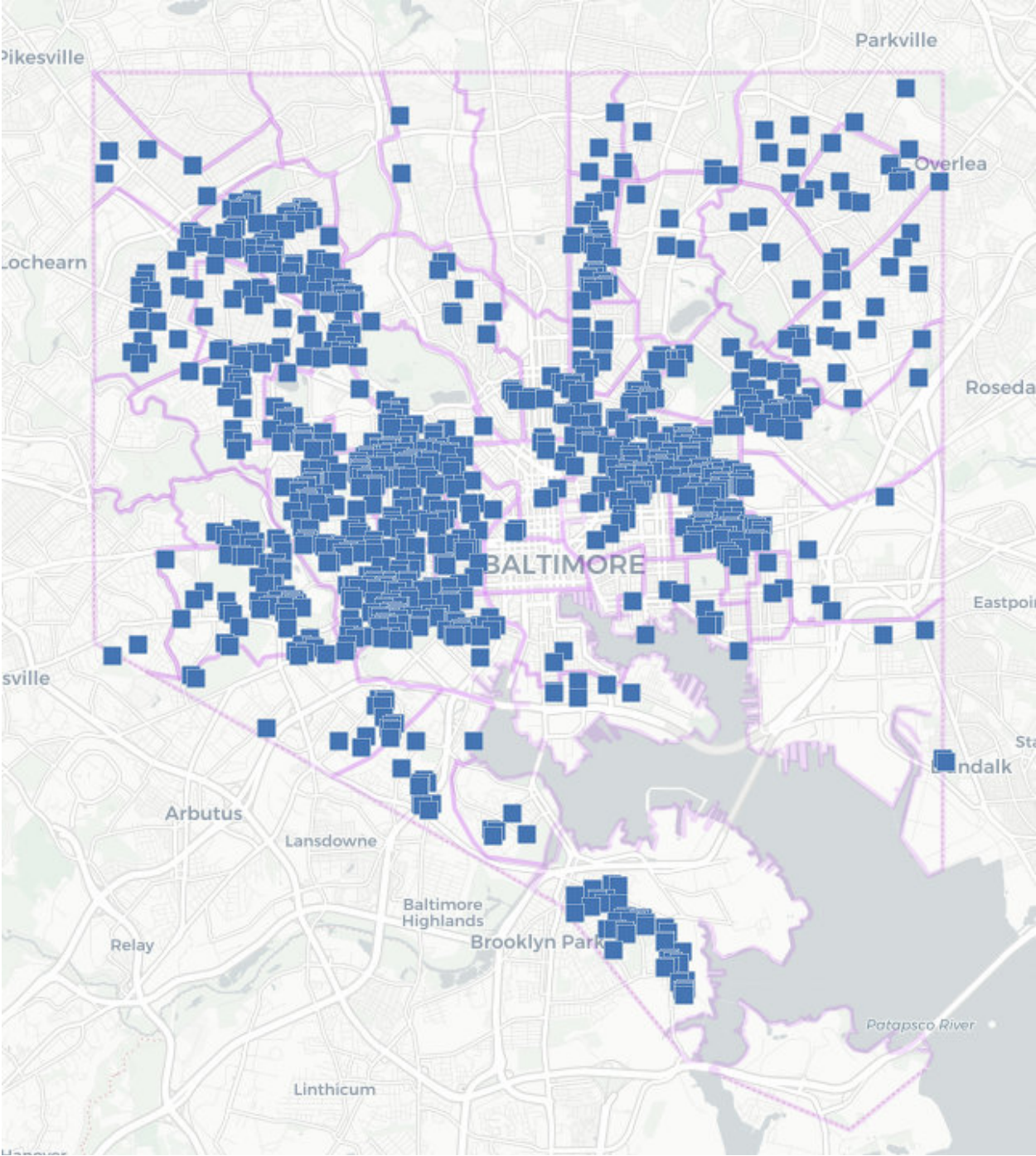
I am writing in support of Bill SB782 State Department of Assessments and Taxation – Real Property Assessments and Appeals.

My name is Bree Jones, and I am the Founder and Executive Director of Parity Homes. Parity is an equitable development company that removes systemic barriers to authentically and equitably rebuild historically Black neighborhoods through collective economics. Parity acquires and rehabilitates vacant and abandoned properties in West Baltimore by the block to create affordable homeownership opportunities. At the core of our work is “Development without Displacement”. We practice real estate and housing development through a racial equity lens to ensure that people who have been historically disinvested of wealth are able to participate in and benefit from reinvestment into their communities. Parity takes extra steps to prevent unintended displacement of legacy residents by connecting them with legal, financial, and aging-in-place resources.

Despite best efforts of organizations like mine, racial and structural barriers to create homeownership, wealth-building, and community revitalization opportunities persist. One such barrier is opaque and inequitable tax assessments. According to an [article](#) written by Nneka Nnamdi of Fight Blight B'More, “In 1972 a [HUD study](#) found largely Black East Baltimore (labeled as blighted) had 10 times the property tax burden of largely white Bolton Hill (labeled as upwardly transitional); a reporter for the Afro commented ‘Many a colored buyer has had the sad experience of having tax assessment upped, not lowered, when he moved in.’ This is perplexing considering that the Brookings Institute found that homes in predominantly black neighborhoods are appraised and [valued 23% lower](#) than comparable white neighborhoods, despite all else being equal. The compound effects of depressed housing values from historic race-based disinvestment and a disproportionate tax burden continue to plague Baltimore’s Black Butterfly. Higher

assessments result in higher property tax bills. And for a segment of Baltimore’s population that is hovering at the poverty line and on fixed incomes, even a small increase in property taxes can push a household further into financial distress and a neighborhood deeper into erosion.”

Tax sale in Baltimore City is a matter of race and equity – Tax Assessments play a role



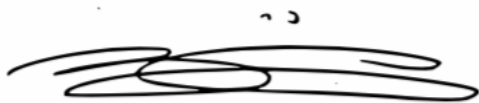
Parity currently works very closely with Maryland Volunteer Lawyer Services (MVLS), which is a non-profit organization that connects pro-bono legal services to low-income people needing civil representation, and Fight Blight Bmore (FBB) a grassroots advocacy organization to assist legacy homeowners in the Black Butterfly that are experiencing home loss due to tax sale and foreclosure. We also assist homeowners with applying to the Homeowners Tax Credit to lessen the burden of property taxes on households on a fixed income. This bill, would significantly help clarify and possibly make more equitable the tax assessment process to reduce home loss due to burdensome and opaque property taxes.

For these reasons, I request a favorable report of SB782.

Regards,

Bree Jones

Executive Director & Founder
Parity Baltimore Incorporated

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bree Jones', with a stylized flourish underneath.

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