



Neighborhood Housing Services of Baltimore, Inc.

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Senator Guy Guzzone
Chair, Budget and Taxation Committee
3 West - Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: SUPPORT of House Bill 852

Dear Chairperson Guzzone and Members of the Committee:

I am the Executive Director of Neighborhood Housing Services of Baltimore. NHS, a non-profit working in Baltimore City, believes all residents deserve the opportunity for decent housing and financial opportunities for their families. We accomplish this by offering housing counseling, financial coaching, affordable loans to low and moderate income customers, conducting acquisition and renovation on vacant properties, community engagement, and helping money flow into historically disinvested communities. Last year we helped over 450 families purchase homes, invested in the preservation of over 100 homes to help seniors age in place and invested and leveraged over \$25 million in West Baltimore. I have had the privilege of working with legislators and advocates from around the state over the past 9 years to identify equitable solutions for tax sale.

NHS of Baltimore **Strongly Supports** HB852. The bill is designed to protect the most vulnerable residents of Maryland who are at risk of losing their homes to tax sale. NHS has worked with many customers at risk of losing their homes to tax sale, and many of these customers faced bills of less than \$2,000, but with very limited income were confronted with the possibility of losing their homes. Resources available to help these homeowners are currently very limited. Payment plans are typically not available, and in many cases, partial payment are not accepted. This leaves homeowners, living on very limited income, with the challenge of coming up with a large lump sum payment or face the risk of losing their homes. For many of these homeowners, their homes have been in their families for many years and are fully paid off. The loss of generational wealth, often from minority households, created by the current tax sale system underscores the importance of creating ways to further support homeowners.

HB852 provides significant protections to numerous homeowners impacted by tax sale. The Homeowner Protection Program allows the State Ombudsman to work with homeowners, determine what supports are needed, connect the homeowner to additional resources available, and structure repayment in a way that is affordable to the homeowner. These steps will help bring economic equity to homeowners who are able to enroll in the program. We look forward to working together with the State Ombudsman to ensure the most vulnerable residents are able to access the Homeowner Protection Program. We strongly support HB852 and respectfully request a **favorable report**.

Sincerely,

Daniel T. Ellis
Executive Director

