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**SB 153**

**PROPERTY TAX - HOMEOWNERS' PROPERTY TAX CREDIT – DEFINITION OF GROSS INCOME  
HEARING BEFORE THE SENATE BUDGET & TAXATION COMMITTEE**

**JANUARY 18, 2022**

**POSITION: SUPPORT**

The Pro Bono Resource Center of Maryland (“PBRC”), an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, is the statewide clearinghouse for pro bono civil legal services in Maryland. As the designated pro bono arm of the Maryland State Bar Association, PBRC provides training, mentorship, and pro bono service opportunities to members of the private bar. **PBRC supports SB 153 because vulnerable homeowners would benefit from increased access to the Homeowners’ Tax Credit to help prevent the loss of their homes.**

Over the past seven years, PBRC has assisted nearly 700 homeowners at risk of losing their homes to tax sale. For homeowners, ending up on the tax sale list is usually the result of the inability to pay one’s property taxes. The clients served by our tax sale prevention clinics held in Baltimore in 2021 represented some of our state’s most vulnerable citizens: 81% were seniors, 26% were disabled, 84% identify as Black, and 81% reported annual household incomes of less than \$30,000. Through the advocacy of volunteer attorneys, many of these clients can access programs and credits that reduce their property tax burden allowing them to stay in their homes. However, most Maryland homeowners are unrepresented.

On average, our 2021 Baltimore clients encountered in our clinics were seniors who had owned their homes for 28 years, and over 70% of them owned their homes free of a mortgage. As lower-income homeowners, the predominant form of accumulated wealth that they have, and that they can pass on to their families, is the equity in their homes. Further, most of the homeowners we see are only able to afford their property taxes with the assistance of the Homeowners’ Property Tax Credit. Because so many of these homeowners are seniors or are caring for seniors, they often have medical or care facility bills that take up significant portions of their income, reducing their household resources with which to pay the costs of homeownership. Changing the definition of gross income for purposes of eligibility would enable more homeowners access to the credit, to pay their taxes, to avoid tax sale foreclosure, and to keep their homes and the equity their families have worked to build.

PBRC supports SB 153, which may protect certain Marylanders from the loss of their family home to tax sale foreclosure, thereby preserving homeownership and the transfer of intergenerational wealth. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

For the above reasons,

**PBRC urges a FAVORABLE report on SB 153.**

Please contact Allison Harris, Director of PBRC’s Home Preservation Project, with any questions.

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