Dear Honorable Delegates:

We, the undersigned 28 organizations, urge you to oppose HB 243 as amended in the Ways & Means Committee. The amendments erode the tax sale protections that the Governor had proposed for the state, and severely weaken existing protections for Baltimore City residents, allowing more homes to be lost in the abusive system.

These amendments gut the Water Taxpayer Protection Act, which the General Assembly unanimously passed in 2019, to protect all households, including renters, and places of worship in Baltimore City from tax sale due to unpaid, incorrect, and unaffordable water bills.

HB 243 was amended to include a proposal (HB 777) from Del. Boyce to resume the harmful practice of selling at tax sale renter-occupied homes and other homes that are not legally recognized as “owner-occupied” over water and sewer bills. It discriminates against residents who cannot afford to own or secure the legal title to their homes.

HB 243 as amended would disproportionately harm Black residents and low-income households, who are more likely to rent their homes. The tax sale process can lead to foreclosure and eviction. It can be expensive and traumatic. Many renters are not responsible for directly paying their water bill as they pay in-rent, and despite being up to date on their rent, they could lose their housing through this process. Tenants are required to receive only 30-day notice to vacate after tax sale foreclosure.

HB 243 as amended is unjust and discriminatory – and unnecessary. Many water systems, including the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission, never use tax sales to collect unpaid water bills.

For these reasons, we urge you to oppose HB 243 as amended.

Sincerely,

1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East
Baltimore Renters United
Campaign for Justice Safety and Jobs
CASH Campaign of Maryland
Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility
Citizens Policing Project
Clean Water Action
Community Development Network of Maryland
Community Law Center
Disability Rights Maryland
Dr. Marvin J. Perry, Morgan State University
Economic Action Maryland
Fight Blight Bmore
Food & Water Watch
Jews United for Justice
Making Changes
Maryland Center on Economic Policy
Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service
Mothers On The Move
NAACP - Baltimore Branch
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund (LDF)
Organizing Black
Parity Baltimore
Pro Bono Resource Center of Maryland
Public Justice Center
South Baltimore Community Land Trust Inc
The SOS Fund
University of Baltimore School of Law Community Development Clinic