

HB 243 as amended - Property Tax - Tax Sales – Revisions

OPPOSITION

March 11, 2024

Dear Honorable Members of the Maryland General Assembly:

We, the undersigned 30 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
- CASA
- 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)
- Northeast Community Organization (NECO)
- 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