



CALVERT COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

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Via Electronic Mail

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: HB0239 - Land Use - Zoning - Limitations (Starter and Silver Homes Act of 2026)

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagen and Committee Members:

The Calvert County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) writes in **opposition to House Bill 0239**.

The BOCC recognizes Maryland's need to expand housing options, and we appreciate the intent to assist young families and senior citizens who are priced out of the market. However, HB0239 is a one-size-fits-all mandate that would disproportionately harm Calvert County, undermine the County's long-standing growth management framework, and disenfranchise our residents by preempting the local planning and zoning processes that are built on decades of public participation.

1) HB0239 strips local control and disenfranchises citizens

Maryland counties have a long tradition of implementing State planning goals through locally adopted Comprehensive Plans and zoning ordinances, developed through extensive public engagement. Calvert County residents consistently and passionately participate in growth and zoning decisions because these decisions directly affect quality of life, neighborhood character, and the preservation of rural and waterfront communities.

HB0239 would effectively wipe out major locally adopted standards and policies by requiring broad "by-right" changes and limiting the County's ability to apply common zoning tools in single-family areas. This is not a minor adjustment. It is a fundamental restructuring of local land use authority. If the State dictates sweeping changes of this magnitude, it raises a basic question: what is the purpose of encouraging robust public participation at the local level if local decisions can be overridden wholesale by State preemption?

2) The bill would force significant rewrites of Calvert's Comprehensive Plan and implementing laws

As drafted, HB0239 would require substantial and costly updates to the County's planning framework, including but not limited to:

- Calvert County's Comprehensive Plan growth management strategy and assumptions (including where and how residential growth is intended to occur);
- Town Center plans intended to direct development toward locations with services and infrastructure;
- The Zoning Ordinance and use tables (including standards related to housing types, setbacks, lot coverage, and other dimensional controls);
- Subdivision regulations and lot-splitting standards that shape neighborhood patterns and long-term infrastructure obligations; and
- Related implementation documents and programs that translate planning policy into enforceable standards.

These changes would not only consume limited staff and fiscal resources but would also functionally undo decades of citizen-involved planning and negotiated community expectations.

3) Calvert County's geography and infrastructure cannot absorb mandated density increases

Calvert County is a peninsula with extensive tidal shoreline and limited options for transportation expansion. The County's transportation network is already constrained by geography and environmental limitations, and additional growth pressure would fall heavily on the corridor that residents and emergency services rely on every day.

Calvert County is also primarily a residential community, with a substantial majority of our workforce commuting outside the County for employment. Any significant increase in housing units without corresponding increases in local jobs will intensify outbound commuting, exacerbate congestion, and strain the regional transportation system, especially during AM and PM peak hours.

Importantly, MD 2/4 is Calvert County's sole north-south transportation corridor and is owned and managed by the State. The County therefore depends on the State for roadway improvements to address congestion and safety. At the same time, the impacts of growth on infrastructure would be further intensified by ongoing State and County budget constraints projected into the future.

4) Environmental concerns and failing septic systems

Calvert County's land and water resources are central to our economy and way of life. The county's extensive shoreline, sensitive waterways and highly erodible soils require careful growth management. Increased density can increase impervious surfaces, stormwater runoff and erosion that threaten local creeks and the Chesapeake Bay.

The county also has numerous communities that rely on onsite septic systems. Failing septic systems are a real concern, particularly in older communities and areas with soil and groundwater limitations. Policies that increase development intensity and subdivision lot splitting can increase wastewater loads and raise the risk of system failures, costly repairs and water quality impacts. HB0239 would add pressure to manage these risks while limiting local tools used to protect environmental resources and public health.

5) No guarantee of affordability

Even where small lots and mixed housing types already exist in Calvert County, housing costs remain out of reach for many households. This reflects a core concern raised repeatedly by residents: reducing minimum lot size or expanding "by-right" entitlements does not automatically produce attainable housing, and can instead increase speculative pressure and infrastructure demand. Calvert County supports workable, targeted solutions to affordability, but HB0239 does not ensure affordability outcomes.

For these reasons, the BOCC respectfully urges the committee to consider the impacts of this legislation and request an unfavorable report as written.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our perspective. Should you have any questions or wish to discuss these concerns further, please contact Planning & Zoning Director Jason Brinkley at 410-535-1600 ext. 2334.

Sincerely,
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
CALVERT COUNTY, MARYLAND



Todd Ireland, President



Mark C. Cox Sr., Vice President



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