



House Bill 1168

Counties and Municipalities – Land Bank Authorities

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

Date: February 28, 2017

To: Environment and Transportation Committee

From: Natasha Mehu and Kevin Kinnally

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 1168 as it provides counties with a new tool to help revitalize problem properties and stabilize neighborhoods.

HB 1168 authorizes counties and municipalities to establish a land bank authority. A land bank offers a process for public funds to be used for targeted revitalization efforts. It can be an effective tool in real estate markets that suffer from an abundance of problem properties and a lack of private sector investment needed to make the area marketable. Land banks can be used to remove barriers such as title acquisition, tax delinquencies, low market values, and outstanding liabilities that prevent or slow the transfer of properties to new and responsible owners.

In 2016, MACo participated in a survey designed to gauge the problems posed by abandoned, blighted, and vacant properties across the state. These properties were found often to be a source of blight and nuisance for the communities surrounding them. The survey results indicated that local jurisdictions were supportive of more tools to address these problem properties and to help neighborhoods in need.

HB 1168 properly leaves the local government as the decision-maker for whether establishing a land bank is in their best interest. Jurisdictions that find land banks beneficial to their community-based plans will have the authority to establish them. Jurisdictions that do not, have the discretion to continue to use whatever available tools are most effective for their local circumstances.

This bill offers local governments an innovative tool to help turn distressed properties into assets, improving the neighborhood in the process. Accordingly, MACo urges a **FAVORABLE** report on HB 1168.