

FACT SHEET



Faith and Housing for the Commonwealth

Support SB 233 (Sen. Hashmi)
Support HB 1124 (Del. Carr)

Problem

There is a shortage of affordable homes in Virginia, both for rental and purchase. The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) released a report on affordable housing in 2021. The JLARC report highlights that over 900,000 households in Virginia are cost burdened by housing, and that the commonwealth has a shortage of over 200,000 homes. While needs are numerically concentrated in urban areas, the high cost of housing affects families in every part of Virginia. At the same time, many faith communities understand that caring for neighbors is a part of their mission. Congregations own land in localities all over Virginia and are interested in supporting community members. Many do this through supporting local shelters and partnering with non-profits, but some are interested in developing affordable housing on their own land. However, challenging zoning regulations and discriminatory attitudes stand in the way.

Background

There are already more than a dozen congregations in Virginia that have developed affordable housing on their property. **The process usually takes between 7 and 20 years**, and a significant part of that time is spent applying for Special Use Permits or zoning changes, along with convincing nearby residents that the development is good for the community. These communities have already seen the benefits of affordable housing. Allowing other congregations to live their mission would benefit all Virginians.

Solution

VICPP advocates a statewide change that would streamline the permitting process for congregations to build multi-family affordable housing on their land. This would exempt development of affordable housing on land owned by any congregation or faith community from local restrictions on multi-family use in that zoning. **In response to an exclusionary attitude of “not in my backyard” (NIMBY), this policy can be thought of as a “Yes in God’s backyard” (YIGBY) approach.** This policy would create an opportunity for congregations to use land to develop new affordable housing, which benefits both the broader community and the faith institution. It ensures the housing remains affordable for the foreseeable future, and it

Faith communities are often located in residential neighborhoods, which means that new residents would have access to community resources. In addition, much of the land owned by faith institutions currently goes unused. There are parking lots and empty offices that congregations would like to see vibrant and supporting the community. Some faith communities have been located on the same land for many years, and have more space than they need, especially with declining weekly attendance. **Faith leaders hear about the need for affordable housing from their members and community, and many want to offer housing.** Developing affordable housing allows congregations to provide resources to community members who are struggling.