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**Testimony of Sosseh Prom, Housing Justice Director, African Communities Together
in support of H.B. 721**

**Virginia House of Delegates
House Courts of Justice - Civil Committee**

Jan. 31, 2024

Hello, and thank you for this opportunity to provide public comment. My name is Sosseh Prom, and I am the Housing Justice Director for African Communities Together (ACT). ACT is a national nonprofit dedicated to fighting for civil rights, opportunity, and a better life for immigrants in the U.S., and does so by empowering African immigrants to integrate socially, advance economically, and engage civically. In this effort, we advocate for equity, dignity and respect for all, which is why we support House Bill 721.

All across the nation, renters have made it clear: the rent is too high and Virginia is unfortunately no exception. Twenty-two percent of Virginia renters fall within income ranges below 30% AMI and can therefore only afford to pay \$855/month in rent without becoming housing cost burdened. Fair market rate one bedroom apartments in Virginia cost on average \$1,203/month, putting our most vulnerable renters at a deficit of \$348 each month. That's \$348 that could be spent on food, clothing, medical expenses, and other necessities. To put this into further context, the hourly wage needed to afford the average one bedroom apartment in Virginia is \$23.13. Here is a list of a few workers who make less than that: service workers, teaching assistants, nursing assistants, security guards, maintenance workers, accounting clerks, home health aides. The list goes on and we must do something now to protect all these vital members of our community who are in constant threat of displacement because they can no longer afford to live here. House Bill 721 addresses these issues by giving localities the power to implement rent control and prevent the displacement of working class families from the communities they have made home. Please note, the bill does not **force** localities to pass rent control ordinances, but simply gives them the option to do so when in the best interest of their residents.

Some opponents to the bill argue that rent control negatively affects housing supply. However, studies show that in jurisdictions where rent control has been implemented, there has been no statistically

relevant effect on supply. Conversely, lack of rent control has also not been shown to increase housing supply. Additionally, economists have pointed to the economic benefits of rent control, as it prevents evictions and homelessness thereby reducing government spending on related systems.

We must also acknowledge that rent control is not a new concept, nor is it one we should shy away from. Homeowners have their own version of rent control through fixed 30-year mortgages, and we encourage and applaud homeownership yet ignore the needs of renters who wish to have a similar level of financial security. Housing is a human right, and it is time that our laws reflect that, which is why I sincerely hope you will join us in supporting the passage of HB721. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Sosseh Prom

She/Her/Hers

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