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Chair Gelser and Members of the Committee,

My name is Brent Wilson and I am a leader with Metropolitan Alliance for Common Good. MACG is a broad-based organization made up of twenty-five institutions of faith, labor, health, and non-profits. We are not a single-issue organization; we advocate for issues that matter to our members. During a listening session last spring, in which individual members of our institutions shared with MACG leaders what the greatest pressures in their lives were, lack of affordable housing emerged as the top issue, three times more than any other issue.

We lack substantial investment in new affordable housing construction, and the existing stock of affordable housing diminishes as rents skyrocket and buildings are upscaled. These facts are changing the heart of our cherished communities and endangering the most vulnerable of our neighbors.

Today I am sharing with you the story of one MACG family, much like too many others struggling in the dire housing market:

“My name is Martha and I am a survivor of human trafficking and domestic violence. I have two babies: a 3 year old and a 16 month old. I endured domestic violence for longer than I would have because I couldn’t find a place to live that I could afford.

“A friend lent me her garage and I was living there for a few months. After that I got help from Volunteers of America for survivors of domestic violence. The social worker found an apartment in a not very [safe] area, away from my family and people who can give me emotional support. The Volunteers of America program ended in June.

“I was able to get help from another organization, Catholic Charities, also for survivors of domestic violence. That program ends in January and I don’t know how I will survive after that because any place I find will require me to earn 3 times the rent, and with a part-time job cleaning houses I can’t earn that amount.

“If I had a full time job I couldn’t afford child care.

“I have been on the waiting list for one year for one of a few apartments for low-income people. I was told I would be on the waiting list for six months; it has now been a year and still nothing. For my children it will be a difficult transition; in the past year we have gone from living in a domestic violence situation to living in a garage to living in the apartment where we are now. All the change is bad for them.

“I live with fear every day, not only because of the dangerous neighborhood but also because I don’t know where I’ll live with my children after the end of the rental program.

“My situation is not unusual: to not be able to find affordable housing in a location where my support system is. We have a crisis. We need more affordable housing in the city.”

Today we urge you to repeal the ban on Inclusionary Zoning. It is time to put control back in the hands of local, elected officials who can change the trajectory of the narratives of our community away from insecurity, vulnerability, and instability and toward a future of wholeness, health, and equity.