March 20, 2020
Governor Lawrence Hogan
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

Governor Hogan,

When we are called to retreat to our homes, it becomes very clear how important housing is to our society. The Maryland Building industry Association is requesting that the State take steps to recognize the essential services that state and local government provide the real estate industry. Home construction is an essential service and should be exempt from shutting down, which would only worsen the ongoing housing shortage. These daily services include title searches, permitting, inspections, and the transfer and recordation of real property transactions. During these uncertain times, our industry not only provides a much-needed product for our customers, but many tradespeople rely on us for jobs.

Locally, we have urgent housing needs to fulfill. If our new home production is disrupted or closed down, even briefly, the impact on society and our economy would be drastic. If families are left homeless during a time where people need to quarantine, it would only exacerbate the public health crisis.

Delays to the construction schedule are inevitable and immediate if the permitting and inspection process is disrupted by shutdowns. Permitting and Inspection services for new home construction are essential services that must be exempt from any closure. Solutions can be achieved while complying with Public Health safely guidelines.

1. Government employees working in Permitting and Inspections need to remain working or telework
2. Permit application, payment, or pick up processes must be maintained even if offices are closed to the public
   a. Set up online tools, drop boxes, snail mail, etc. for all document delivery
   b. Begin accepting credit card or other electronic forms of payment
3. Building Inspectors that visit new home construction sites can do so without violating social distancing guidelines. Limitations could be placed on the number of people allowed on the site for scheduled inspections.
4. Where possible, allow for virtual inspections and other options using technology that is available. Use of smart phones could be a great solution.
5. If the local governments are unwilling or unable to provide inspections, they need to immediately allow for a private provider. Agencies in other areas of the country are already allowing and using Third Party Inspectors extensively (or the ability to do virtual inspections). Several local jurisdictions already allow for limited third Party Inspections for a variety of construction phases. This needs to be immediately expanded in our region to include all necessary inspections.
6. The courthouses need to remain operational to accept deed and other recordings so that homebuyers can continue to settle on their houses.

These steps would keep the economic engine of new home construction spinning and would provide much needed economic stability during this uncertain time. We appreciate the severity of this situation and understand how difficult this balance will be but believe these measures are necessary for our State and its citizens. Thank you for your strong leadership and response during these difficult times.

Sincerely,

Lori Graf, CEO, Maryland Building Industry Association