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Just Communities:
Frequently Asked Questions

1. **Why is the Just Communities Act necessary?**

   The Moore-Miller administration seeks to win the decade by creating a competitive, equitable economy with pathways to work, wages and wealth for all Marylanders. To create these pathways, we must acknowledge and accept responsibility for the negative effects of past policy decisions that have adversely impacted socioeconomically marginalized and minoritized communities for multiple generations. The Just Communities Act enables the State of Maryland to acknowledge, repair, and right the wrongs of the past.

   The Just Communities Act will:

   - Affirmatively advance equity, civil rights, racial justice, and equal opportunity in the state of Maryland;
   - Create opportunities for the improvement of communities that have been historically underserved, with anticipated benefits for the entire state; and
   - Right the wrongs of the past, wherein the state systematically excluded certain groups from equal participation in the benefits of public resources

2. **Who will benefit? Who will be served?**

   A Just Community geographic layer to target and prioritize state investments is anticipated to advance economic, racial and health equity in the State of Maryland.

   By concentrating investment in areas that have historically been systematically excluded from the benefits of public resources, the people living in those communities are expected to benefit significantly. The exact demographic composition of the Just Community targeting layer will not be known until the mapping exercise and designation process is complete.

   These efforts are expected to have broader benefits for the entire state by fostering more equitable development, reducing disparities, and creating healthier, more resilient communities that contribute to the overall social and economic well-being of the state.

3. **What is a "Just Community"?**

   In the 2024 legislative session, the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development introduced, and its partners in the General Assembly passed, HB 241 and SB 308 to create a new "Just Community" designation that will be applied to certain areas in Maryland.

A new "Just Community" geographic data layer was created, similar to Priority Funding Areas and Sustainable Communities, to target state investment.

Based on a series of criteria, the DHCD Secretary will recommend to the Governor communities in Maryland that have borne the brunt of segregation, discrimination, and other forms of place-based harm to be prioritized in state funding decisions.

This designation lasts five years. A potential Just Community must have past and current economic and housing trends that demonstrate a need for reinvestment in the area combined with data-driven metrics and methodology tracked by the Division of Just Communities, including:

- Legal racial segregation such as redlining; urban renewal or highway projects;
- High state imprisonment rates, also known as mass incarceration; and
- Unequal exposure to environmental and health hazards

Just Communities are those that affirmatively advance equity and civil rights, create opportunities for the underserved and right the wrongs of the past.

4. What does the Division of Just Communities do?

The Division of Just Communities works to support the State in counteracting past policy decisions by government agencies and entities that have adversely impacted underserved and overburdened communities for multiple generations.

The Division is responsible for developing a map overlay to guide the DHCD Secretary in recommending certain areas in Maryland as Just Communities to the Governor for designation.

The Division's approach includes strategic planning, program evaluation and mapping, community engagement and thought leadership that draws upon racial equity and social justice frameworks to reform existing programs and investments as well as to launch new initiatives and partnerships.

The Division of Just Communities' mission is both internally and externally focused.

- Internally, the Division of Just Communities collaborates with teams across DHCD to enhance outcomes for marginalized populations
- Externally, the Division of Just Communities works to build relationships with marginalized communities to ensure they have a voice in government decision-making and benefit from public investments

Additionally, the Division of Just Communities team works with mission-aligned institutions, bodies and organizations, like the Commission on Environmental Justice and Sustainable Communities, as well as with State agencies and jurisdictions to build and strengthen partnerships in communities to ensure we are respectful of and responsive to the needs of residents that lead to equitable outcomes.