



HB 744 Landlord and Tenant – Residential Leases – Tenant Rights and Protections (Tenant Protection Act)

House Environment and Transportation Committee

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Submitted by Margo Quinlan and Stacey Jefferson, Co-Chairs

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The Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) appreciates the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of HB 744, which will provide important protections to tenants throughout Maryland. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, a third of Marylanders are renters. Marylanders living in or near poverty are naturally over-represented in this figure.

HB 744 will make it easier for tenants to break their leases due to unsafe conditions and to defend themselves in court. The legislation will enable tenants living in unsafe and unhealthy conditions, which the landlord has failed to repair, to terminate their lease early on thirty days' notice. This provides an important and welcome alternative to the rent escrow process for tenants, as rent escrow is often a lengthy process that does not result in the landlord making the necessary repairs. MAP supports HB 744 because it recognizes and values tenants' health and provides a mechanism for tenants to lawfully move from unsafe and unhealthy rental properties.

HB 744 will expand already-existing early lease termination provisions for tenants who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault to include victims of stalking. This is a logical and laudable step, as stalking is often a precursor to acts of domestic violence or sexual assault. Numerous other states provide for early lease termination in cases of documented stalking, including but not limited to Massachusetts, Minnesota, North Carolina, Texas, and Washington. MAP supports HB 744 because it recognizes and values tenants' safety and provides a mechanism for tenants to lawfully move from rental properties where they are unsafe due to stalking.

HB 744 will require landlords to return security deposits within thirty days of the end of the tenancy. Currently, Maryland law gives landlords forty-five days to return the security deposit after a tenant moves out. Numerous other states provide for return of the security deposit within thirty days, including but not limited to Georgia, Kansas, Louisiana, and Texas. HB 744 will also require landlords who withhold the security deposit to provide supporting documentation for repair work to fix the physical damage to the property purportedly caused by the tenant. MAP supports HB 744 because it will increase transparency and accountability in the security deposit law for tenants.

MAP appreciates your consideration and urges support for HB 744.

Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) is a coalition of service providers, faith communities, and advocacy organizations advancing statewide public policies and programs necessary to alleviate the burdens faced by Marylanders living in or near poverty, and to address the underlying systemic causes of poverty.