



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony in Support of HB744
Tenant Protection Act of 2020**

Testimony by Delegate Vaughn Stewart

February 18th, 2020 • Environment and Transportation Committee

What the Bill Does

HB744 will offer protections to tenants living with abusive landlords and in unsafe conditions. First, the bill allows tenants to terminate their leases early, and receive relocation expenses, if their landlord has created an unsanitary environment. Second, the bill extends existing lease termination protections for victims of sexual assault to victims of stalking. Third, the bill aligns our laws regarding security deposits with neighboring states by giving landlords 30 days, rather than 45 days, to return a security deposit. Fourth, the bill requires more disclosure of utility billing. And finally, the bill grants tenants the ability to use community spaces within their buildings for the purpose of organizing tenants' associations.

Why the Bill Is Important

Most landlords provide safe and sanitary housing for their tenants. However, as the percentage of Marylanders who rent their homes grows—it's now nearly 40%—we should ensure we're looking out for those tenants who are poor enough, or sometimes just unlucky enough, to be subjected to abusive landlords.

For example, in October of last year, Attorney General Brian Frosh sued an apartment management company owned by senior White House adviser Jared Kushner, alleging it used "unfair or deceptive" rental practices while running rodent-infested apartments in the Baltimore region. Tenants alleged that they had to endure living in units infested by rodents, plagued by water leaks that have caused mold, and lacking in basic utilities. Some tenants experienced rodent infestations so severe that they "have rodents living and dying in walls and kitchen appliances; damaging carpeting; chewing holes in drywall and screen doors; and leaving droppings on floors, counter tops, and furniture." There are plenty of landlords with less famous names subjecting their tenants to similar treatment.

VAUGHN STEWART
Legislative District 19
Montgomery County

Environment and Transportation
Committee

Subcommittees
Environment
Land Use and Ethics



The Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street, Room 220
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3528 · 301-858-3528
800-492-7122 Ext. 3528
Vaughn.Stewart@house.state.md.us

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Why the Committee Should Vote Favorably

Most tenants do not have to live with the Jared Kushners of the world as their landlord. Most landlords try to provide a decent place for their tenants to live in. But to protect those who do find themselves in unsafe conditions, we should strengthen Maryland's tenant protections.

None of the provisions in the bill are radical; in fact, every provision is modeled after laws in many other states. **In 2019, Maryland was ranked the 20th most hostile state toward tenants—even states like Kentucky, Tennessee, and Oklahoma have stronger tenant protections than we do.** If you're living in substandard conditions or if you're being stalked, you cannot legally break your lease in Maryland. If you choose to nevertheless remain in those unsafe conditions, you cannot easily organize with your neighbors to collectively demand better treatment. If you do break your lease, you cannot recoup a security deposit soon enough to use that money as a security deposit on your next home.

No Marylander should be trapped in an unsafe home just because they're poor. I urge a favorable report.