



HOMELESS PERSONS REPRESENTATION PROJECT, INC.

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**SUPPORT – HB 797 – Statewide Eviction Data Reporting
Hearing of the Judiciary Committee, February 19, 2020
Testimony of Carisa A. Hatfield, Staff Attorney
Homeless Persons Representation Project**

The Homeless Persons Representation Project, Inc. (HPRP) is a non-profit legal services organization that provides free legal representation to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness on legal issues that will lead to an end to homelessness. HPRP represents subsidized tenants in failure to pay rent cases in Baltimore City Rent Court every week.

HB 797 would create a central source for data regarding all evictions and foreclosures in the state of Maryland. This is currently lacking in Maryland. Indeed, Princeton’s Eviction Lab launched the first-ever national dataset on evictions in the United States in 2018. However, data on evictions in Maryland was mostly inaccessible to the researchers at Princeton; only three Maryland counties were included in their research because no central data source exists in the state. The judiciary does not maintain data about actual evictions, and while some sheriffs’ departments collect some data, the data points and formats vary.

HB 797 would address this deficiency, making information about where and when tenants are facing eviction in Maryland publicly available, without requiring the collection of personal tenant identifiers. It would cover all court-ordered evictions and foreclosures in every jurisdiction in the state, with quarterly reported data that would make it easy to map and identify trends in eviction and foreclosure data.

The collection of eviction and foreclosure data statewide would have multiple benefits. It provide a fuller and clearer picture of the true scope of the eviction epidemic across Maryland, which could then inform the allocation of financial resources for eviction prevention. This is an important part of homelessness prevention, for as the old adage states, “if you cannot measure it, you cannot improve it.” HPRP supports HB 797 because it will measure essential data points that will allow for improvements in how we assist individuals vulnerable to homelessness.

Indeed, the collection and publication of eviction data has been an important first step for cities across the country in addressing the eviction epidemic. As a result of the aforementioned study by Princeton, for example, the city of Richmond, Virginia launched an Eviction Prevention and Diversion Program that is now under consideration for statewide implementation. Statewide eviction data also helped the cities of Cleveland and Philadelphia establish civil right to counsel in landlord-tenant cases, becoming the fourth and fifth cities in the country to guarantee such a right.

HB 797 would allow for the collection of valuable data in an efficient, reliable manner for the entire state while still preserving the confidentiality of tenants. Collection of eviction data would give Maryland the opportunity to be on the forefront of innovation in eviction prevention.

HPRP urges the Committee to issue a FAVORABLE REPORT on HB 797.

Please contact Carisa A. Hatfield, Homeless Persons Representation Project, at 410-685-6589 ext. 32 or chatfield@hprplaw.org with any questions.