



**MARYLAND
LEGAL AID**

Advancing
**Human Rights and
Justice for All**

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March 2, 2020

The Honorable Delegate Kumar P. Barve
House Environment and Transportation Committee
Room 251, House Office Building
Annapolis MD, 21401

**Re: Testimony in support of House Bill 1223 - Screening of Tenants and
Renewal of Tenancy**

Dear Chairman Barve and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this important bill. Maryland Legal Aid (MLA) is a non-profit law firm that provides free legal services to the State's low-income and vulnerable residents. MLA handles civil legal cases involving a wide range of issues, including family law, housing, public benefits, consumer law (e.g., bankruptcy and debt collection), and criminal record expungements to remove child custody barriers, housing, a driver's license, and employment. Maryland Legal Aid supports HB 1223 and asks that this committee give it a favorable report.

This letter serves as notice that Alex Avdakov, Esq. will testify in support of House Bill 1223 on behalf of Maryland Legal Aid at the request of Delegate Melissa Wells. The coronavirus pandemic has made it difficult for residential tenants to both retain their housing and move to new housing. Even prior to the pandemic, affordable housing levels were far below demand for low income and working families. Apart from a lack of housing, issues related to credit reporting, lack of credit, lack of income, and domestic violence created unseen roadblocks for tenants in the application process and the preservation of their shelter. Without knowing what landlords require for acceptance of a housing application, tenants end up spending limited funds to submit applications, hoping that their application will be accepted. HB 1223 enables Maryland residential tenants applying for housing to have a better roadmap to secure a living space. The proposed legislation requires that landlord establish a written policy for the approval of a housing application, and make the policy accessible and available to prospective tenants. HB 1223 also requires clear standards that must be followed if an application is denied, and that these standards that must be communicated to the applicant.

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HB 1223 allows for a more even consideration of income by lowering the minimum income ratio to 1-1, while also requiring evidence of being able to pay the rent advertised, which gives low-income tenants a better chance of securing housing.

In sum, this legislation improves outcomes for both Maryland's landlords and tenants. MLA strongly supports HB 1223 and asks that this committee give it a favorable report.

Sincerely,

/s/ Alex Avdakov
Alex Avdakov, Esq.