



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 154

Landlord and Tenant - Eviction Action - Right to Counsel

Senate Budget and Taxation and Judicial Proceedings Committees

January 28, 2021

Submitted by Stacey Jefferson and Julia Gross, Co-Chairs

Member Agencies:

Advocates for Children and Youth
Baltimore Jewish Council
Behavioral Health System Baltimore
CASH Campaign of Maryland
Catholic Charities
Episcopal Diocese of Maryland
Family League of Baltimore
Fuel Fund of Maryland
Health Care for the Homeless
Homeless Persons
Representation Project
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League of Women Voters of Maryland
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Maryland Community Action
Partnership
Maryland Family Network
Maryland Hunger Solutions
Paul's Place
Public Justice Center
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Welfare Advocates

Marylanders Against Poverty

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Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) strongly supports SB 154, will ensure that low-income tenants in Maryland facing eviction have the right to an attorney to enforce existing legal protections.

Even with COVID-19 legal protections in place, over 2,500 renter families were evicted during COVID-19 in MD. Eviction laws and protections are only as good as their enforcement, and right to counsel will lay the foundation for more equitable, sustainable housing in Maryland as we recover.

This bill will level the playing field for tenants in rent court. 96% of landlords in the Stout study were represented, while only 1% of tenants were represented. This bill will level the field and ensure tenants are treated with respect and dignity. Further, in a 2016 survey of Baltimore renters, 80% of respondents had a defense to their eviction case, but only 8% of renters without counsel successfully raised a defense based on conditions of disrepair.

The right to counsel in eviction cases will also provide significant social and economic benefits to the State. A [recent report](#) by Stout shows that an annual investment of \$5.7 million in a right to counsel for tenants in one Md. jurisdiction would yield \$18.1 million in benefits/costs avoided to the State (and \$17.5 million to the locality). Costs savings or benefits include costs related to homeless shelters, Medicaid spending in hospitals, homeless student transportation, and foster care costs. According to Stout, 92% of represented tenants would avoid disruptive displacement with a right to counsel in one Maryland jurisdiction, and in areas of New York City where right to counsel was implemented, 86% of represented tenants stayed in their homes.

MAP appreciates your consideration and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for SB 154.

Right to Counsel in Eviction Cases is part of a larger package of Housing Justice bills necessary to support safe, healthy, fair, and affordable housing in Maryland. Marylanders Against Poverty proudly supports this package. For more information visit www.rentersunitedmaryland.org

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.