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BILL NO.: **SB 154**

TITLE: **Landlord and Tenant - Eviction Action - Right to Counsel**

SPONSOR: **Senator Hettleman**

COMMITTEE: **Judicial Proceedings**

POSITION: **SUPPORT**

DATE: **January 28, 2021**

Baltimore County **SUPPORTS** Senate Bill 154 – Landlord and Tenant - Eviction Action - Right to Counsel. This legislation would establish that certain individuals have the right to legal representation in eviction proceedings and create the position of the Right to Counsel in Evictions Coordinator.

The right of any citizen to legal representation in court is a cornerstone of American democracy. When an individual’s freedom is called into question, they are afforded representation by their government to ensure they have an adequate defense to the charges leveled against them. Determinations made during eviction proceedings have grave effects, yet only those who can afford it get adequate representation.

Evictions are not just a matter of displacement. An eviction remains on an individual’s credit score indefinitely, and makes finding a new residence nearly impossible moving forward. The lifelong consequences of these actions disproportionately affect low-income individuals, yet these are precisely the individuals who cannot afford to retain counsel to fight the proceedings. When Baltimore County halted evictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was to ensure the consequences of unemployment did not turn into a crisis of housing. Ending this cycle of poverty that feeds the homelessness crisis, begins with addressing the systemic issues that perpetuate it.

SB 154 does this by establishing the Right to Counsel in Evictions Coordinator in the Office of the Attorney General. This would ensure evicted individuals are guaranteed the representation they deserve.

Accordingly, Baltimore County requests a **FAVORABLE** report on SB 154. For more information, please contact Chuck Conner, Director of Government Affairs, at cconner@baltimorecountymd.gov.