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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB154/HB18
Landlord and Tenant - Eviction Action - Right to Counsel

TO: Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee
FROM: Samantha Blau

My name is Samantha Blau and I am a resident of Baltimore City in the 46th district. I write to you to ask for your support of SB154/HB18, Landlord and Tenant - Eviction Action - Right to Counsel.

Being a renter can be a relief, when there is a plumbing issue it is someone else's responsibility to call a plumber and pay the bill. Being a renter can also be precarious, your access to safe housing is reliant on a person who is trying to make a profit from your basic human need for housing. Landlords have much more power than the typical seller in a transaction. If you buy a pear from the supermarket and it turns out to be rotten you can easily return it for a refund and move on. If you discover mold in the bathroom of your rental property it is up to the landlord to do the right thing and hire an abatement team. Supermarkets seem to plan for a margin of loss due to rotting produce, but from the terrible stories shared in rent court it would seem many landlords do not plan for such loss.

Whether the situation is mold, pests, or a loss of income due to a global pandemic, there are many legitimate reasons a renter may have an issue making regular payments for their housing. Attending a court hearing to sort out the issues might make sense, if there was a balance of power. If landlords can begin proceedings for eviction without any prior mediation, can use sheriff resources to forcibly remove a person from their living space, then the least the state can do is to ensure that the tenant is represented by someone who understands the laws being used in the case. That one change in the balance of power could go a long way to ensuring that tens of thousands of Maryland residents have access to safe housing, that thousands of children avoid disruption to their education by moving schools, that sheriff resources are conserved, and that court time can be better used. **I respectfully urge this committee to give a favorable report on SB154.**