



Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition

Testimony to the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
SB0154: Landlord and Tenant - Eviction Action - Right to Counsel
Position: Favorable

January 28, 2021

The Honorable William Smith Jr., Chair
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
cc: Members, Judicial Proceedings Committee

Honorable Chair Smith and Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition (MCRC) is a statewide coalition of individuals and organizations that advances economic rights and financial inclusion for Maryland consumers through research, education, direct service, and advocacy. Our 8,500 supporters include consumer advocates, practitioners, and low-income and working families throughout Maryland.

We are writing today in support of SB0154.

SB0154 proposes a cost-effective means of preventing disruptive displacement of residents from their homes by ensuring that tenants have the right to an attorney in eviction cases. A recent report by Stout Risius Ross shows that an annual investment of \$5.7 million in a right to counsel for one Maryland jurisdiction alone would yield \$35.6 million in benefits or costs avoided to the City and State by reducing homelessness caused by eviction¹. Costs savings or benefits include costs related to homeless shelters, Medicaid spending in hospitals, lost state funding to City schools, and foster care costs. State savings from these programs are estimated at \$90.1 million.

Even with COVID-19 legal protections, over 2,500 renter families were evicted in Maryland in the past 9 months. MCRC's Tenants' Rights program empowers tenants to advocate for themselves by providing information about housing rights and responsibilities, legal information, mediation, and referrals to other nonprofits and legal services. The requests we have received for assistance with eviction have skyrocketed by 1086% since the beginning of the pandemic. COVID-19 has exponentially increased the housing insecurity impacting Maryland tenants.

More evictions during the COVID-19 pandemic will jeopardize the health of Maryland families. The CDC is now citing stable housing as a vital tool to control the spread of coronavirus². Among other factors, evictions drive homelessness and are linked to deteriorating health. At least 23% of homelessness is

¹ <https://bmorerentersunited.org/rtc/stoutreport/>

² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/homelessness.html>



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caused by eviction.³ Curbing evictions is both a matter of public health, as well as a civil rights issue. Due to COVID-19, 36% of Black households in Maryland are likely facing an eviction action, compared to 14% of white households. A report by Dr. Timothy Thomas finds that in Baltimore City, the number of evictions of Black women is 3.9 times higher than the number of evictions of white men⁴.

Legal representation matters. Currently, only 1% of tenants are represented in court, compared to 96% of landlords. In Baltimore City, where Right to Counsel legislation was recently adopted, 92% of represented tenants will avoid disruptive displacement. This translates to 5,777 households and 17,300 people each year.

Maryland should join Baltimore City, Philadelphia, New York City, San Francisco, Cleveland, Boulder and Newark in recognizing that the right to counsel in eviction cases is a proven, cost-effective means of preventing disruptive displacement of residents from their homes.

For all these reasons, we support SB154 and ask for a favorable report.

Best,

Isadora Stern
Economic & Tenants' Rights Organizer

³, <https://evictions.study/maryland/report/baltimore.html>

⁴ <https://evictions.study/maryland/report/baltimore.html>