

Testimony of Latonya Abrom
In favor of HB 18, Right to Counsel
House Judiciary Committee
8415 Flower Avenue
Silver Spring 20910
Thursday, February 17, 2021

Good Afternoon Chairman Clippinger and Vice-Chairman Atterbeary and committee members, and thank you Delegates Fisher, Wilkins, Stewart and Rosenberg for your leadership on this bill.

My name is Latonya Abrom and I live in Sky Properties in Silver Spring.

From January 10 until February 20 of last year I was without heat. I first complained to the property manager—every day, but they ignored my complaints saying they would fix it the next day, but did not. I had to use the stove and space heaters to keep warm.

I contacted the county code enforcement who demanded that the heat be fixed. The property manager told also said that the problem would be fixed the next day. But when code learned that it was not fixed a week later, they threatened to fine the property.

The heat was finally fixed in late February. Later, property staff attempted to enter my apartment to repair a damaged wall that preexisted my tenancy. As I keep a door chain on the front door and exit my home through the back door to the parking lot, maintenance staff claimed that I was blocking their ability to make repairs—though they were perfectly capable of entering my home through the back entrance.

Instead, without my permission, the property management removed the door chain. When I replaced it the next day, they threatened me saying I was violating the lease by preventing them from entering, a falsehood verified again by the county who told property staff that I had every right to maintain a door chain and that property management was not prohibited from entering my apartment with proper notice through the back door.

On March 4, I received a threatening notice to vacate that was obviously retaliatory for seeking county assistance.

Not knowing where to turn, I reached out to the Renters Alliance who helped me find pro bono legal assistance for me from Maryland Legal Aid. Upon review of my case, and the discovery that the property staff was attempting to evict me not only out of retaliation, but in an attempt to empty the complex because they were about to sell the property. My attorney immediately reached the property attorney, who, once learning that I was represented by Counsel, dropped the case, which was then dismissed.

Had I not been helped by the Renters Alliance and a Legal Aid lawyer and had to handle this myself, I know that I would now be homeless in the middle of a pandemic. What the old property staff did was reprehensible, and obviously wrong. Having a lawyer allowed me to keep my home. And now, under new property management, I live safe and secure in my home.

I ask you to support House Bill 18 and give renters like me a fair chance to protect our homes from unjust attempts at eviction.