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WRITTEN TESTIMONY

House Bill 18 – Landlord and Tenant – Eviction Action – Right to Counsel

Judiciary Committee

February 17, 2021

SUPPORT

Background: House Bill 18 (HB18) would establish the right to legal counsel for low-income tenants in rent court who are facing eviction. Additionally, it introduces a number of resources for tenants to help them know their rights throughout the eviction process, creates an Eviction Coordinator position in the Office of the Attorney General, and establishes a taskforce to study and improve tenants' access to counsel in Maryland.

Written Comments: The pandemic has created a housing crisis in Maryland, which could eventually amount to an unprecedented number of evictions. SB 154 would help mitigate the effects of this crisis by ensuring that all tenants have access to what should be considered basic resources during an eviction.

Just 1% of tenants appear in rent court with representation, compared to 98% of landlords who do have representation. This undoubtedly leaves tenants lost in the proceedings of rent court and makes it significantly more likely they will conclude with a negative disposition. Not only would this bill keep more tenants in their homes, it would save the state and localities millions of dollars each year in services for would-be homeless families, while decreasing the burden on law enforcement and the courts. Right to counsel already exists in Baltimore City, and is being implemented in major cities such as New York and San Francisco. It is time we guarantee this right in our state.

As the legislative arm of The Associated: Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, we represent Comprehensive Housing Assistance Inc. (CHAI). CHAI works to provide assistance to all residents of Northwest Baltimore. This includes helping them find a safe place to live, and to stay in their home even during difficult circumstances. This bill would provide CHAI, and all housing assistance agencies in Maryland with more of the tools they need to continue helping clients in need. With this in mind, the Baltimore Jewish Council urges a favorable report of HB 18.

The Baltimore Jewish Council, a coalition of central Maryland Jewish organizations and congregations, advocates at all levels of government, on a variety of social welfare, economic and religious concerns, to protect and promote the interests of The Associated Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, its agencies and the Greater Baltimore Jewish community.

BALTIMORE JEWISH COUNCIL

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Jewish Federation of Baltimore