



Senate Bill 384

Landlord and Tenant - Stay of Eviction Proceeding for Rental Assistance Determination

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Environment and Transportation
Committee

Date: March 29, 2022

From: D'Paul Nibber

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** SB 384. This bill would, among other provisions, allow a tenant to stay an eviction proceeding while waiting for a determination regarding the tenant's good faith application for rental assistance. Amendments adopted by the Maryland Senate further refine the bill to limit stays for up to 35 days and require renters to apply for rental assistance within 30 days of an eviction filing.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an unprecedented effort by Maryland to stabilize the housing market. As a result, counties have been relied upon to distribute federal emergency rental assistance to qualified tenants experiencing financial distress. County agencies have worked diligently to ensure this assistance is provided in a timely manner. A total of over 70,000 applications for rental assistance have been processed with over 40,000 households having received assistance.

Unfortunately, in the recent past, state and federal guidelines regarding payment distribution record-keeping, evidence of rental arrangements, and collection of qualifying income documentation contributed to delays in assistance payments. In recent months, counties have increased the efficiency and timeliness of their emergency rental assistance programs, yet eviction filings concerning tenants eligible for assistance persist.

County officials share the concern that many eligible tenants are not aware of, or are having difficulty applying for, emergency rental assistance. Moreover, as the pandemic subsides, recent data from district courts across the state show that evictions proceedings are beginning to be heard at near pre-pandemic rates. SB 384 is needed to ensure housing stability for vulnerable tenants. Upon eviction, these former tenants are faced with cascading negative health and economic issues including homelessness, food insecurity, and job loss—placing a substantial burden on state and county resources.

SB 384 is a narrowly tailored measure to protect vulnerable Marylanders from needless evictions and avoid a preventable drain on state and local resources. For these reasons, MACo **SUPPORTS** SB 384 and urges a **FAVORABLE** report.