
BILL NO: House Bill 86
TITLE: Landlord and Tenant – Residential Leases – Tenant Rights and Protections
COMMITTEE: Environment and Transportation
HEARING DATE: January 18, 2022
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

House Bill 86 provides protections for landlords and tenants. The Women’s Law Center of Maryland (WLC) supports this legislation, especially as it provides increased protections for tenants who are victims of domestic violence.

House Bill 86 confers many critical protections to tenants including those that are victims and survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. HB 86 expands who may provide the necessary documentation that a person is in fact a victim or survivor of domestic violence so that the victim may terminate their residential lease. Current law permits lease termination for domestic violence victims in certain circumstance and with certain restricted forms of proof of the status as a victim – the existence of a final protection order. Many victims of domestic violence seek assistance from service providers or medical professionals and do not utilize the protective order or peace order process. The definition of “Qualified Third Party” as amended in HB 86 is victim-centered and consistent with existing law, specifically determining eligibility for the Address Confidentiality Program, Md. Code Ann. State Govt. § 7-304. A victim of domestic violence should not be compelled to go to court and obtain a protective order or peace order to prove that they are in fact a victim and access protections available to them in Maryland law.

House Bill 86 defines domestic violence to include the definition of abuse found in MD Code Ann. Family Law, § 4-501. This is existing law. The WLC supports this definition as it reflects the current understanding and knowledge of domestic violence and includes acts such as assault, rape, and stalking. Victims of domestic violence must often flee their homes to escape the potentially life-threatening violence they are facing. In doing so they risk homelessness. This is further complicated and exacerbated by the economic instability victims of domestic violence face, often a direct result of their abuse. Legislation such as HB 86 is critical to support victims so they can leave their abusers without facing further economic harms.

Therefore. The Women’s Law Center of Maryland urges a favorable report on House Bill 86

The Women’s Law Center of Maryland is a private, non-profit, legal services organization that serves as a leading voice for justice and fairness for women. It advocates for the rights of women through legal assistance to individuals and strategic initiatives to achieve systemic change, working to ensure physical safety, economic security, and bodily autonomy for women in Maryland.