

SHELLY HETTLEMAN
Legislative District 11
Baltimore County

Judicial Proceedings Committee

Joint Committee on Children, Youth,
and Families

Joint Committee on the Chesapeake
and Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area



James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 203
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3131 • 301-858-3131
800-492-7122 Ext. 3131
Shelly.Hettleman@senate.state.md.us

The Senate of Maryland ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

TESTIMONY OF SENATOR SHELLY HETTLEMAN SB 279 ACCESS TO COUNSEL IN EVICTIONS SPECIAL FUND – ALTERATION

Senate Bill 279 allows money from the Attorney General’s Consumer Protection Division (CPD) to be used for the Access to Counsel in Eviction Special Fund (“Special Fund”). The bill is needed to make sure that the legislation we passed last year, ensuring tenant access to counsel is fulfilled, tenants are protected, our courts stay efficient, and property owners can manage their customer interactions more economically.

This bill states that money from settlements or judgments against parties investigated or charged by the CPD may be used to fund the Special Fund. It does not raise taxes, fees or otherwise change the budget. The idea behind the bill stems from legislative action on similarly situated lawsuits brought by our state – against tobacco companies and opioid manufacturers. In this case, in a suit involving large real estate companies, the Office of Administrative Hearings addressed a lengthy list of complaints against large scale property management companies and landlords. The action brought by the Attorney General sought to protect tenants by identifying the unfair trade practices by some of the worst actors in our state.

This bill does nothing to punish good landlords, or in any way increase the cost of operating as a landlord in any jurisdiction in Maryland. This bill simply states that money from settlements or judgments from cases where tenants’ property and consumer rights were violated can be used to fund access to counsel in eviction cases. The money goes to the Maryland Legal Services Corporation, which administers the fund and disperses the money to the appropriate legal services providers in Maryland.

In 2000, Maryland created the Cigarette Restitution Fund. That fund created an annual revenue stream to improve health and social services to support Marylanders impacted by all of the harms of smoking. In 2019, we created the Opiate Restitution Fund based on the same idea – that the money that comes from these cases should go towards fixing peoples’ lives. This fund does exactly the same thing. It ensures that money from these actions against the worst actors in our state goes to fixing the problems that we all agree need fixing.

For the foregoing reasons, I urge this committee to adopt a favorable report.