Dear Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee,

This testimony is being submitted by Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore, a group of individuals working to move white folks as part of a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County. We are also working in collaboration with CASA de Maryland and Renters United Maryland. I am a resident of I am a resident of District 41, the Roland Park neighborhood, in Baltimore City. **I am testifying in support of Senate Bill 384.**

This bill allows for a stay of eviction proceedings when a tenant can show they have already applied for rental assistance and are awaiting a determination. It also prohibits the landlord from refusing to accept rental assistance funds as payment or collecting the debt through other judicial actions.

The goal of rental assistance is to allow folks to continue living in their homes, averting the massive consequences that eviction can have on one's life and, during the pandemic, limiting risk to public health. Currently, many renters experiencing difficulties paying rent are still facing eviction despite having already applied for emergency rental assistance. Because overburdened government agencies have taken months to process applications, the tenants who applied for emergency assistance are left to the mercy of landlord who can still file for evictions for nonpayment of rent – tenants who are *in the process of receiving that already-allocated money*. Through no fault of their own, during these still-unstable pandemic times, tenants may suffer the chaos of eviction and risk contagious disease because currently the law does not protect them in such cases.

The National Equity Atlas estimates rent debt across the country from US Census and Treasury data. On January 30, they reported an estimated 105,000 households were behind on their rent in Maryland. Having an eviction judgment (even an unjust eviction) makes it even harder for folks to find affordable housing, and the pandemic continues to especially endanger those without stable housing. In addition, sudden eviction is especially difficult for children who are part of 51% of households in arrears. Worsened school performance, increased drop-out rates, higher rates of adolescent violence, and suboptimal health outcomes are just some of the negative outcomes social scientists have documented among children who have experienced eviction. It is especially painful to have children experience these severe stressors knowing that their parents/guardians did "the right thing" to try to keep their family stable by going through the application process to access the emergency assistance offered by the government.

We know that safe and stable housing has far-reaching economic, health, and social benefits to individuals, families, and communities, and is key to reducing racial inequities. This is even more true during the ongoing public health and economic crisis. "Eviction," our state's Attorney General Brian E. Frosh has said, "is not simply a condition of poverty. It's a root cause. It perpetuates a cycle that can last for generations." The National Equity Atlas also estimates that 74% of tenants behind on their rent in our state are people of color, including Blacks, Latinx, and Native Americans. People of color form less than half of this state's population, and helping them remain in their homes ensures we don't continue perpetuating long-standing inequities in housing and eviction policies.

Most importantly, if we truly believed these eviction prevention programs were important, we would set the conditions in place to allow them to actually prevent eviction. Allowing folks to be evicted while awaiting determinations for aid just makes these programs life-jackets made of lead.

It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to **vote in support of Senate Bill 384.**

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sarah Johnson
1 Merryman Court
Baltimore, MD 21210
Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore