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TESTIMONY ON HBI 74 - POSITION: FAVORABLE

Landlord and Tenant - Repossession for Failure to Pay Rent - Registration and License Information

TO: Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee
FROM: Molly Amster, on behalf of Jews United for Justice

My name is Molly Amster. I am a resident of District 43 and am the Maryland Policy Director and Baltimore Director for Jews United for Justice (JUFJ). I am submitting this testimony on behalf of JUFJ in support of HBI 74, Landlord and Tenant - Repossession for Failure to Pay Rent - Registration and License Information. JUFJ organizes 6,000 Jews and allies from across Maryland in support of local social, racial, and economic justice campaigns.

Since the beginning of Jewish history, when the Torah reports that Adam and Eve were expelled from their home in the Garden of Eden, the human need for housing has been central to Jewish thought. Jewish sacred texts recognize that having safe, stable housing is key to a healthy society, and we know that it is key to reducing racial inequities. These texts have taken on even more urgency in the past two years: all people should be able to live in safe homes, especially during a pandemic.

HBI 74 would ensure that rent dockets throughout Maryland provide no safe harbor for landlords who operate in violation of local rental licensing ordinances. Similar legislation that passed in this Committee and the House as recently as 2021, were focused on specific localities: Baltimore City, Anne Arundel County, and Prince George's County. This bill would cover all jurisdictions.

This legislation would effectively bar unlicensed, law-breaking landlords from taking advantage of the court's specialized, "summary" procedures for eviction. By blocking their use of a taxpayer-funded debt collection process, this bill eliminates the financial incentive to ignore city or county public-safety mandates. HBI 74 is a much-needed measure to support localities in the enforcement of their rental licensing ordinances, which were put in place to ensure safe housing for their renting residents.

On behalf of Jews United for Justice, I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HBI 74.