

Senate Bill 384
Landlord and Tenant – Stay of Eviction Proceeding for Rental Assistance

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 15, 2022

Support

Catholic Charities of Baltimore strongly supports SB 384, which is an emergency bill that allows tenants to present in eviction proceedings evidence that they are awaiting a determination in a good-faith application for rental assistance, and if the evidence is satisfactory the court must stay the proceedings until the application has been processed and disbursement of any funds awarded.

Inspired by the gospel to love, serve and teach, Catholic Charities provides care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. As the largest human service provider in Maryland working with tens of thousands of youth, individuals, and families each year, we see the traumatic impact of eviction and housing displacement every day. Homelessness and housing instability are public health crises, and the failure of Maryland's safety net systems to assist struggling low-income renters has only been exacerbated by the pandemic. COVID-19 has laid to bare longstanding inequities in our systems, including inequitable eviction processes. We strongly support SB 384, and the examples below outline how we see this legislation benefiting those we serve.

SB 384 will reduce the incidence of homelessness by granting tenants the necessary time it takes to access critical eviction assistance. We provide homeless services across central and western Maryland, and often those we work with tell us their households spiraled into homelessness due to an eviction they faced without support. The stories we hear mirror what Census shows: in January 2022, just under 150,000 Maryland households are at risk of eviction.¹ Stable housing is a cornerstone of stable families, and there is historic levels of funding available for emergency rental assistance programs (ERAP), but accessing these dollars takes time. Unfortunately, the court does not currently have the authority to temporarily pause eviction proceedings so that tenants can complete their application process, creating a frantic race between organizations facilitating ERAP distribution and the eviction process. No one should be evicted – especially in an ongoing pandemic – when there are dedicated funding sources available to pay for unmet rent.

Temporarily pausing eviction proceedings for rental assistance determination assists in the social and economic recovery from COVID. Without stable shelter, families are more susceptible to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), hunger, behavioral health crises, and poor health. These past two years in our head start programs our caseworkers have talked to hundreds of parents that have told us they are at risk of eviction and looking for assistance. The pandemic has demonstrated the gaping holes in our safety net programs, especially for people of color. Ensuring that emergency rental assistance is accessible and functional improves the socioeconomic outlook of low-income families at risk of eviction, and is a national best practice followed by 16 other states.

Changing our eviction process is sound fiscal policy. Evictions further entrench families into homelessness, poverty, and ACEs, which are extraordinarily expensive to address. Maryland should be working to prevent loss of housing, especially among households with children. Safe and reliable housing provides the stability needed to secure and maintain employment, promote good health, invest in educational opportunities and ultimately saves the state resources that otherwise go to maintain shelters and state-funded safety net programs. We know our individuals and families thrive in economically secure households with stable housing, and thriving families means a thriving economy.

On behalf of the individuals and families we work with, Catholic Charities of Baltimore appreciates your consideration, and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for SB 384.

Submitted By: Lisa Klengenmaier, Assistant Director of Advocacy

¹ US Census. 2022. Census Household Pulse Survey Data. <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2021/demo/hhp/hhp41.html>