

Dear Members of the House Judiciary and Environment & Transportation Committees,

I am a resident of District 21. Fairness and equity are important values that I hold and want to have reflected in Maryland law. **I am testifying in support of House Bill 691.**

This bill offers both renters and landlords the power to request and receive postponement of legal proceedings while either party accesses legal counsel, calls witnesses, and/or collects documents. Furthermore, when eviction prevention services—which include counseling, dispute resolution, and civil legal aid—are available in the court building, judges shall allow a recess so either party can use those services. It is sensible and fair to permit people to access these services.

Beyond illness itself, the pandemic has made renters' lives difficult. These lean economic times have meant thousands of low-income renters find themselves facing eviction. Furthermore, renters are disproportionately persons of color. Even though Maryland has over \$400 million in federal rental assistance available, it takes time to gather necessary documents, apply and process applications. It only makes sense that renters should attain access to these resources when it matters most, in court. Over 100,000 Maryland households are behind on rent and are still struggling to access that federal money.

Society benefits when people are housed. With a secure home, workers can do their best work and support our economy. With a secure home, students can concentrate and learn. With a secure home, parents and children can nurture healthy relationships, avoiding tension and abuse. With a secure home, people don't inadvertently spread disease. Most importantly, separating people from their homes is a cruelty so harsh that it should only be allowed when all opportunities for redress and due process have been provided to those at risk of losing everything. It is in society's interest to prevent evictions. Yet, in the second half of 2021, an average of 650 evictions took place each month. Let's reduce evictions, avoid them whenever possible, for the good of everyone.

It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote **in support of House Bill 691.**

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,

Linda K. Girdner

941 Fall Ridge Way

Gambrills, MD 21054