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Marylanders Against Poverty

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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 691

Landlord and Tenant and Wrongful Detainer Actions – Eviction Prevention Services

House Judiciary Committee

February 16, 2022

Submitted by Julia Gross and Kali Schumitz, Co-Chairs

Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) strongly supports HB 691, which aims to require courts to grant a recess on the trial date of any residential eviction case for purposes such as accessing legal services or rental assistance programs that are on site and available to help.

Even with COVID-19 legal protections in place, over 2,500 renter families were evicted during COVID-19 in MD. Eviction laws and protections are only as good as their enforcement, and increasing access to counsel and rental assistance programs will lay the foundation for more equitable, sustainable housing in Maryland as we recover.

This bill will level the playing field for tenants in rent court. In a January 2022 **survey of 30 pro bono housing attorneys** from 12 offices operating in 15 Maryland jurisdictions, only 17% of attorneys reported local courts in all or most cases **postpone** trials to allow tenants to come back with necessary evidence or witnesses in all or most cases - compared to **50%** for landlords.

In addition to benefiting Maryland renters, having access to counsel in eviction cases will provide significant social and economic benefits to the State. A [recent report](#) by Stout shows reported savings or benefits including costs related to homeless shelters, Medicaid spending in hospitals, homeless student transportation, and foster care costs.

By implementing the changes outlined in HB 691, eviction dates can be used to problem-solve and reach alternatives that do not force Marylanders, particularly vulnerable and low-income Marylanders, to lose their homes

MAP appreciates your consideration and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for HB 691.

Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) is a coalition of service providers, faith communities, and advocacy organizations advancing statewide public policies and programs necessary to alleviate the burdens faced by Marylanders living in or near poverty, and to address the underlying systemic causes of poverty.