



House Bill 691

Landlord and Tenant and Wrongful Detainer Actions – Eviction Prevention Services

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Judiciary and Environment &
Transportation Committees

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From: D'Paul Nibber

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 691. This bill would grant a tenant a recess or continuance of a proceeding involving the wrongful detainer of property if the tenant is seeking eviction prevention services, including financial assistance from a county government.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, and its associated economic effects, the potential for tenant evictions has threatened to compound our communities' difficulties. To stabilize the housing market, counties have been relied upon to distribute federal emergency rental assistance to qualified tenants experiencing financial distress. County agencies have worked diligently to ensure this assistance is provided in a timely manner. A total of over 70,000 applications for rental assistance have been processed with over 40,000 households having received assistance.

Unfortunately, state and federal guidelines regarding payment distribution record-keeping, evidence of rental arrangements, and collection of qualifying income documentation contributed to recent delays in assistance payments. In recent months, counties have increased the efficiency and timeliness of their emergency rental assistance programs, yet eviction filings concerning tenants eligible for assistance persist.

County officials share the concern that many eligible tenants are not aware of, or are having difficulty applying for, emergency rental assistance. HB 691 is needed to ensure housing stability for these vulnerable tenants. Upon eviction, these former tenants are faced with cascading negative health and economic issues including homelessness, food insecurity, and job loss—placing a substantial burden on state and county resources.

HB 691 would protect vulnerable Marylanders from needless evictions and by doing so, avoid the preventable drain on state and local resources. For these reasons, MACo **SUPPORTS** HB 691 and urges a **FAVORABLE** report.