

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



This testimony is being submitted by Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore, a group of individuals working to move white folks as part of a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County. We are also working in collaboration with CASA de Maryland and Renters United. I am a resident of MD District 41. I live in the Roland Park neighborhood of Baltimore City. **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. It also provides that, 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 make use of those services.

Beyond illness itself, the pandemic has made renters' lives difficult throughout Maryland. Over 100,000 Maryland rental households are behind on rent, even though Maryland has over \$400 million in federal rental assistance already available for use. The overburdened State systems that administer the assistance program have not been able to keep up with the volume and pace of eviction-related legal proceedings, and thus renters facing eviction are *still* having trouble accessing the resources – including *time* – needed to have a fair chance in court. It is because of these extraordinary times, and because of the urgency with which the topics of eviction and potential homelessness need to be addressed, that HB 691 should be passed. This bill is also important in order to address racial and economic structural inequity in housing, since renters are disproportionately persons of color.

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 in school and learn. With a secure home, parents and children can nurture healthy relationships, avoiding tension and the trauma that often accompanies the instability that accompanies homelessness. Secure housing is also a serious public health issue during the pandemic. Finally, separating people from their homes due to pandemic circumstances beyond their control is a cruelty that should only be allowed when all opportunities for fair redress and due process have been provided for.

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,

Sarah Johnson  
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Baltimore, MD 21210  
Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore