House Bill 691
Landlord and Tenant and Wrongful Detainer Actions – Eviction Prevention Services
House Judiciary Committee
February 16, 2022
Support

Catholic Charities of Baltimore strongly supports HB 691, which allows tenants to request from the court a recess or continuance in proceedings so that the requesting party can access eviction prevention services located at the court building and/or so the requesting party can gather their defense materials and representation.

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 HB 691, and the examples below outline how we see this legislation benefiting those we serve:

HB 691 will reduce the incidence and burdens of homelessness. 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 alone and without mediation or support. The stories we hear from our clients mirror what Census shows: as of January 2022, just under 150,000 Maryland households are at risk of eviction.[1] Stable housing is a cornerstone of stable families, and this bill promotes early engagement with tenants, alternative resolutions to eviction, and strengthens the fairness of the eviction process without unduly delaying landlords' right to repossess a property through the courts.

Reenvisioning eviction proceedings in Maryland will assist 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 - including increased risk of contracting COVID. 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. Evictions and homelessness have a disparate impact on black and brown communities. Establishing alternatives to quick evictions improves the socioeconomic outlook of low-income families, and is a tangible step in the effort to dismantle the inequities born of structural racism and oppression in our legal and social safety net systems.

Changing our eviction process is sound fiscal policy. Evictions further entrench families into homelessness, poverty, and adverse childhood experiences, 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 HB 691.

Submitted By: Lisa Klingenmaier, Assistant Director of Advocacy

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

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