



MLSC

MARYLAND LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION

IOLTA - INTEREST ON LAWYER TRUST ACCOUNTS

Testimony Concerning HB 691
“Landlord and Tenant and Wrongful Detainer Actions – Eviction Prevention Services”
Submitted to the House Judiciary Committee
Hearing Date: February 16, 2022

Position: Favorable

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Maryland Legal Services Corporation requests a favorable report on House Bill 691, enactment of which would grant parties in landlord-tenant cases time to seek civil legal aid, among other eviction prevention services.

MLSC is a legislatively created nonprofit organization with a mission to ensure low-income Marylanders have access to stable, efficient and effective civil legal assistance through the distribution of funds to nonprofit legal services organizations. The Maryland General Assembly recognized the importance of civil legal services in rent court by passing the Access to Counsel in Evictions Program during the 2021 session. When funded, the Program will provide legal representation as well as related tenant outreach and education, ensuring low-income tenants facing loss of housing know their rights and have an advocate to guide them through the court process.

As the administrator of the Access to Counsel in Evictions Program, MLSC looks forward to building on our previous eviction prevention grants to ensure the Program proceeds effectively and efficiently, once funding is provided. While one goal of the Program will be to connect as many tenants as possible with counsel before the day of their hearing, we know that some tenants will not be reached through earlier efforts and will show up to their hearing unrepresented. Connecting these tenants with counsel at that time will be vital to serve hard-to-reach eligible tenants.

Existing day-of-court services have had great success in helping tenants avoid or delay eviction. Even if a tenant doesn't have a defense, allowing them time to speak to an attorney engenders trust in the justice system. When the Program is fully funded and services are available statewide, allowing for a brief pause so that tenants can be connected with counsel will greatly improve the efficiency and effectiveness of services.

MLSC asks for favorable consideration of House Bill 691.