



Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition

Testimony to the House Judiciary Committee
HB 691: Landlord and Tenant and Wrongful Detainer Actions – Eviction Prevention Services
Position: Favorable

February 16, 2022

The Honorable Luke Clippinger, Chair
House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building, Room 101
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
cc: Members, House Judiciary Committee

Honorable Chair Clippinger and Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition (MCRC) is a statewide coalition of individuals and organizations that advances economic rights and financial inclusion for Maryland consumers through research, education, direct service, and advocacy. Our 8,500 supporters include consumer advocates, practitioners, and low-income and working families throughout Maryland.

We are writing today in support of HB 691.

The bill would require the court to grant a recess for wrongful detainer actions to allow tenants and landlords to obtain eviction prevention services. This requirement will grant both tenants and landlords effective methods of diverting eviction. The bill promotes alternative resolutions and use of well established resources including governmental, nonprofit, and charitable organizations that provide social work services, counseling, financial assistance for rent or relocation, alternative dispute resolution, or civil legal aid.

MCRC's Tenant Advocacy program empowers tenants to advocate for themselves by providing information about housing rights and responsibilities, legal information, mediation, and referrals to other nonprofits and legal services. The requests we have received for assistance with eviction have increased by 36% over 2020. COVID-19 has exponentially increased the housing insecurity impacting Maryland tenants.

In 2021, our Tenant Advocacy Program received 1271 complaints from Maryland residents statewide. Of those 1271, 800 were related to eviction. This bill would help direct tenants faced with eviction to services like MCRC's Tenant Advocacy Program that promotes housing stability by providing alternative resources and solutions.

Eviction prevention is an essential step in repairing Maryland's housing crisis and promoting housing stability. This bill would give service providers more time to address tenants' underlying financial challenges and keep them in their homes. Pursuing alternative resources beyond the court can help



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prevent an eviction judgment from being entered on a tenant's record. For many tenants, having an eviction on their record – even if the case was ultimately dismissed or the court ruled in the tenant's favor – will adversely affect their ability to rent another property or access affordable housing opportunities in the future.

This change to the eviction process is long overdue, and carries racial justice implications as most families affected by eviction and the lack of affordable housing are non-white households. Only 17% of our 512 tenants who needed assistance with eviction in 2020 were white. In a 2020 Baltimore City eviction study it was found that the number of Black eviction removals is 3 times higher than white evictions and 46% more female headed households were removed from their homes as compared to male headed households.¹ Eviction diversion is a powerful solution that mitigates the harm of evictions and ensures that tenants are able to secure alternate housing and avoid homelessness.

For all these reasons, we support HB 691 and ask for a favorable report.

Best,

Isadora Stern
Policy Associate

¹ <https://evictions.study/maryland/report/baltimore.html>