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**TESTIMONY ON BILL HB1050 – POSITION: FAVORABLE**  
**Access to Counsel (ATC) in Evictions - Funding**

**TO:** Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, members of the House Appropriations Committee  
**FROM:** Anna T. Levy

My name is Anna T. Levy, a resident of Rockville, MD, District 16. I am submitting this testimony in support of HB1050, Access to Counsel (ATC) in Evictions Special Fund – Funding, to extend a stable baseline of \$14 million in annual funding beyond FY2024.

Safe and stable housing has far reaching economic, health, and social benefits to individuals, families, and communities, and is key to reducing racial inequities. Renters routinely have little agency when faced with threats to maintaining stable housing. As a Jewish person, I am taught that all people should have *dei machsoro*, resources sufficient for each person's needs. (Deut. 15:7-8) Consequently, society has an obligation to make sure that people can stay in their homes.

In 2021, the MD General Assembly passed the Access to Counsel in Evictions bill, HB18, establishing Access to Counsel to provide legal service to low-income tenants. Providing a right to counsel to tenants in eviction cases is a proven means of preventing displacement of families and the resulting social, economic, and public health costs of loss of home. Renters who don't have the advantage of an attorney are typically unable to defend themselves even when they have a legitimate defense that would help to avoid eviction. Previously, over 90% of landlords were represented by an attorney while over 90% of tenants were not. Having counsel is reported to be 92% effective in preventing disruptive displacement in evictions.

Since implementation of the law began 8 months ago, families have begun to obtain legal representation that has helped them to avoid displacement by avoiding eviction, loss of housing subsidies, enforcement of tenants' rights and more. In many jurisdictions, services are now available to tenants before trial and on the day of court. Access to Counsel in Evictions furthers racial equity, empowering people behind on rent to enforce existing legal protections. 82% of families in Maryland facing evictions because they are behind on rent are headed by persons of color.

A secure, stable baseline of \$14 million per year is a starting point for implementation of Access to Counsel in Evictions and is but one proven tool to address housing stability needs.

**I respectfully urge a Favorable report from the Committee in support of HB1050.**