



**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1050**

**Access to Counsel in Evictions - Funding  
Appropriations Committee**

**FAVORABLE**

**TO:** The Hon. Ben Barnes, Chair, the Hon. Mark S. Chang, Vice-Chair and members of the Appropriations Committee

**FROM:** Heather East, Chase Home and member, Maryland Episcopal Public Policy Network

**DATE:** March 7, 2023

Chase Home, Inc, and the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland support HB 1050 making permanent a requirement that the Comptroller distribute \$14,000,000 of certain abandoned property funds to the Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund; and making permanent a requirement that the Governor include in the annual budget bill an appropriation of \$14,000,000 from the Fund to the Maryland Legal Services Corporation.

The Chase Home, Inc. is particularly pleased to offer a favorable testimony in strong support of the HB 1050. On behalf of Chase Home, Inc. we recently supported the application for funding for the Anne Arundel County Eviction Prevention Legal Program submitted by Community Legal Services of Anne Arundel County and Prince George's County (CLS). Over the past year CLS has filled a much-needed void in the delivery of legal services to Anne Arundel County residents through their newly established Anne Arundel County Eviction Prevention Legal Program. The Chase Home has been able to refer families at risk of eviction due to loss of income during the pandemic to CLS with confidence that they will receive free quality legal assistance. We work closely with their attorneys and staff to provide targeted eviction prevention assistance to stabilize housing for those at high risk of eviction. Our mission and that of CLS are closely aligned, and the outcome for those referred is overwhelmingly positive.

Historically, very few tenants are represented in landlord tenant cases and the results can lead to dire consequences for tenants, including risk of homelessness. CLS staffs the Glen Burnie District Court during the daily rent docket with an experienced staff attorney and a paralegal so that representation is available for people who have not had the benefit of either legal advice or representation leading up to their hearing. This benefits not only the tenants, but also the landlords as well since it can open lines of communication that can lead to negotiated settlement rather than the eviction.

In Anne Arundel County, Community Legal Services works hand-in-hand with Chase Home to assist their clients in accessing emergency eviction prevention funds so that landlords are paid arrearage and tenants are able to keep their homes and get back on their feet. Where tenants are at immediate risk of eviction, CLS can intervene through negotiation or with appropriate court filings to allow time for families to avoid eviction or come up with an alternate plan. As the funding



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becomes less readily available, people will be in greater need of legal services to help them navigate the legal landscape and avoid eviction.

The program has a very successful history. In 2021, the Chase Home partnered with Civil Justice, who provided free counsel, with funding provided by Anne Arundel County Executive Stuart Pittman's pilot program called Rent Eviction Avoidance Program (REAP). At the conclusion of the program, the Chase Home had given in two different pledges a total of \$51,500.00 in financial assistance for public housing tenants who are women and may have children and reside in Housing Authority of the City of Annapolis (HACA) properties. Overall, 32 women facing imminent eviction have been assisted by Civil Justice attorneys, and \$44,106.71 has been paid to HACA on these tenants' behalf.

The program has also been reducing racial disparities. All 32 women who received assistance are African-American, and one (1) woman is currently married. There was an average number of children in the households that the Chase Home served of 1.59. Eleven (11) out of the 32 women were over 55 years of age, and the average household income at the time assistance was requested was \$17,229.63.

In total, the REAP pilot program completed a total of 198 intakes for 191 different tenants facing eviction. So far, 170 households have received free legal representation by Civil Justice and financial assistance from ACDS, and 176 households have received some type of financial assistance, whether it be from ACDS, the Chase Home, or St. Vincent de Paul.

In 2022, Chase Home partnered with Community Legal Services with a similar program to REAP called Eviction Prevention Program (EPP). To date, 48 single women, with 30 of these women also head of household with children, for a total of 75 children, have been able to keep their homes thanks to CLS attorney representation in court, funding provided for the free legal services, access to legal counsel to represent clients facing imminent eviction, and counsel's ability to negotiate down rent in arrears and a more affordable rental rate.

We request a Favorable report