



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: Rev. Ken Phelps, Jr., Co-Chair, the Maryland Episcopal Public Policy Network

DATE: March 7, 2023

The Episcopal Diocese of Maryland supports 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.

Housing, along with health, education and a healthy environment, are regarded as basic human rights by our Church.

Historically, very few tenants are represented in landlord tenant cases and the results can lead to dire consequences for tenants, including risk of homelessness. Enabling representation for people who have not had the benefit of either legal advice or representation leading up to their hearing would be invaluable. It 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.

We believe that we have a moral obligation to meet the needs of all of brothers and sisters. Jesus made that the central theme of his teaching, and even remarked that the nations – not individuals – would be judged by how well they cared for the marginalized. His list included those who were seeking shelter.

We applaud the efforts of the House and Senate to provide assistance to those who wish nothing more than to keep that shelter.

The Episcopal Diocese of Maryland requests a Favorable report