



House Bill 1050 Access to Counsel in Evictions - Funding

House Appropriations Committee
March 7, 2023

Support

Catholic Charities of Baltimore HB 1050, which permanently funds the Access to Counsel in Evictions (ACE) Special Fund at \$14,000,000.

Inspired by the Gospel to love, serve and teach, Catholic Charities provides care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. For 100 years, Catholic Charities has accompanied Marylanders as they age with dignity, obtain empowering careers, heal from trauma and addiction, achieve economic independence, prepare for educational success and feel welcome as immigrant neighbors. As one of the largest human service providers in Maryland, we see the traumatic impact of evictions and housing displacement every day.

HB 1050 will reduce the incidence housing instability by permanently funding ACE. We provide homeless services across central and western Maryland, and often those we work with tell us their households spiraled into homelessness due to an eviction they faced alone and without supports. Stable housing is a cornerstone of stable families, and Maryland is a leader in the Right to Counsel movement by granting low-income tenants access to counsel in their eviction proceedings. While Maryland's initial implementation of the law only recently started - and still has a long way to go to reach full implementation - families have begun obtaining representation and fighting back against eviction.

A secure baseline of \$14 million/year to fund ACE through HB 1050 is important to address implementation challenges with ACE. In a tight labor market, legal services organizations have struggled to recruit and retain highly skilled attorneys for ACE implementation. The stable baseline of funding for implementation in HB 1050 would provide assurances to organizations and attorneys who are considering this field that there would be some stability of funding moving forward. We understand that \$14 million is not adequate to realize full implementation of ACE, but HB 1050 is a critical starting point.

Funding ACE is sound fiscal policy. Evictions further entrench families into homelessness, poverty, and adverse childhood experiences, which are extraordinarily expensive to address. Maryland should be working to prevent loss of housing, especially among households with children. Safe and reliable housing provides the stability needed to secure and maintain employment, promote good health, invest in educational opportunities and ultimately saves the state resources that otherwise go to maintain shelters and state-funded safety net programs. We know our individuals and families thrive in economically secure households with stable housing, and thriving families means a thriving economy.

On behalf of the individuals and families we work with, Catholic Charities of Baltimore appreciates your consideration, and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for HB 1050.

Submitted By: Lisa Klingenmaier, Assistant Director of Advocacy