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TESTIMONY ON HBI050 POSITION: FAVORABLE

Access to Counsel in Evictions - Funding

TO: Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, & members of the Appropriations Committee

FROM: Molly Amster, Maryland Policy Director & Baltimore Director, Jews United for Justice

My name is Molly Amster. I am a resident of District 43, in Baltimore City and serve as Maryland Policy Director & Baltimore Director for Jews United for Justice (JUFJ). I am submitting this testimony in support of HBI050 - Access to Counsel in Evictions - Funding. JUFJ organizes 6,000 Jewish Marylanders and allies from across the state in support of local and state campaigns for social, racial, and economic justice.

Since the beginning of Jewish history, when the Torah reports that Adam and Eve were expelled from their home in the Garden of Eden, the human need for housing has been central to Jewish thought. Our sacred texts recognize that having safe, stable housing is key to a healthy society, and we know that it is key to reducing racial inequities.

Evictions lead to homelessness, negative physical and mental health impacts, tears families apart, negatively impacts educational outcomes and neighborhood safety and stability. Attorneys working in Access to Counsel have helped families avoid disruptive displacement including by avoiding eviction, delaying eviction so the tenant has additional time to move, avoiding a loss of a housing subsidy, enforcing a tenant's rights under a lease and more. That's why identifying sustainable resources for the Access to Council in Evictions (ACE) Fund is so critical.

Access to Counsel in Evictions furthers racial equity. [Study](#) after study in Maryland and nationally show that persons of color are much more likely to have to face an eviction case. [82% of families behind on the rent in Maryland and facing evictions are headed by persons of color](#). Ensuring that each of those families is represented by legal counsel helps empower those persons to enforce existing legal protections that safeguard due process, prohibit illegal fees, and address unsafe housing conditions.

On behalf of Jews United for Justice, **I respectfully urge this committee to return an unfavorable report on HBI050.**