

Dear Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee,

I am a resident of District 46 and am submitting this testimony as a member of Showing Up for Racial Justice – Baltimore. I am also a member of the Baltimore City Property Tax Assessment Appeals Board, which hears many landlord complaints. **I am testifying in support of [SB0504](#).**

Senate Bill 504 allows local jurisdictions to require a just basis for landlords to either refuse to renew or to cut off month-to-month/week-to-week leases. This legislation would enable local legislatures to pass their own laws, if they choose, limiting how and when lease non-renewals occur, requiring landlords to have a just cause to non-renew, or requiring landlords to prove a just cause in court.



During the COVID-19 pandemic, as the rate of non-payment eviction was slowed by court delays and emergency rental assistance, [lease-non-renewal evictions roughly doubled](#). This means that working people and their children face the constant threat of displacement, even when they follow all the rules. They have no choice but to accept declining conditions and increasing rents just to stay in their communities.

As most of us know, moving – even in the *best* of situations – is highly disruptive. And for families with children, the choice is often to uproot their child(ren) from their current school, or to face long and unreliable commutes across town to keep children in their current school.

In my position at the Property Tax Assessment Appeals Board, I see that some landlords are content with a steady income and a stable tenant. But other landlords are constantly looking to eke out a larger profit from their paying tenants, whatever the consequences may be. Maryland's present "no cause" policy tacitly encourages this harmful practice. In contrast, with SB504's "just cause" policy, a landlord may choose not to renew an expiring lease *only if there is an acceptable basis for that decision*.

A [2019 study from Princeton & the Eviction Lab](#) found "just cause eviction ordinances have a significant and noticeable effect on eviction and eviction filing rates. Given the budget limitations of many states and municipalities to fund other solutions to the eviction crisis, passage of just cause eviction ordinances appears to be a relatively low-cost, effective policy solution." Without this bill, jurisdictions like Montgomery County and Baltimore City face preemption challenges to trying just cause eviction policies. This bill gives local legislatures the power to decide what's acceptable and when. It recognizes that local legislatures know how best to help their renters stay stably housed and able to contribute to the workforce and the economy.

This issue goes beyond economics to long-standing racial inequities in housing policy. The [National Equity Atlas](#), shares demographic statistics about rent debt sourced from US Census and Treasury data. On January 30, they reported an estimated 105,000 households were behind on their rent in Maryland. Of those, 74% of tenants are people of color, including Blacks, Latinx, Native Americans. **Crucially, 51% of those households include children, a disproportionate number of whom are Black and Brown, and [social scientists have documented](#) declining school performance, increased drop-out rates, higher rates of adolescent violence, and worse health outcomes as negative outcomes among children who experienced eviction.** People of color form less than half of this state's population, and helping them remain in their homes ensures we stop perpetuating racial inequities, especially lifelong detriments suffered by children.

It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote **in support of SB504**.

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,

Liz Simon-Higgs

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Showing Up for Racial Justice - Baltimore