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TESTIMONY ON BILL SB0504 – Position: FAVORABLE
Landlord and Tenant – Residential Leases and Holdover Tenancies – Local Just Cause Termination Provisions

TO: Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Anna T. Levy

My name is Anna T. Levy, a resident of Rockville, MD, District 16. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB0504, Landlord and Tenant - Residential Leases and Holdover Tenancies - Local Just Cause Termination Provisions.

Safe and stable housing has far reaching economic, health, and social benefits to individuals, families, and communities, and is key to reducing racial inequities. Renters routinely have little agency when faced with threats to maintaining stable housing. As a Jewish person, I am taught that all people should have *dei machsoro*, resources sufficient for each person's needs. (Deut. 15:7-8) The home is a critical source of stability for individuals and families. It provides a nexus for social interactions for families, friends, and communities. We know from published research, including that of Matthew Desmond and Princeton's Eviction Lab, that the disruption resulting from evictions contributes to long term physical, psychological, educational, and economic damage that can condemn people to poverty and destabilize communities.

Evictions create significant costs for state and local government related to funding for shelter and education, as well as health care provided in hospitals instead of by community-based providers, transportation costs for homeless youth, and foster care. Notably, evictions have a disparate impact on Black and brown households in Maryland. Decreasing the number of evictions would help to reduce significant racial inequities and strengthen the financial status of individuals and our communities. Thus, we have an obligation to make sure that people can stay in their homes.

There are valid contractual reasons for non-renewal of rental leases. Bill SB0504 would enable local jurisdictions to protect tenants who are fulfilling their contractual obligations so that they can continue to maintain a safe and stable home. Currently, landlords can decide not to renew a tenant's lease for any reason, even when a tenant fully meets their rent and fee obligations and adheres to the terms of their lease. This means that a landlord can force out a tenant who complains about unsafe or unhealthy conditions or because the landlord wants to dramatically raise rents. SB0504 does not negate a landlord's right to not renew the lease of disruptive or delinquent tenants. It simply protects tenants who are doing the right thing to stay in their homes by requiring landlords to provide a just cause for non-renewal of a lease.

SB0504 grants authority to counties and local policymakers to determine the appropriate "just cause" policy to meet the needs of their locality. The bill defines "just cause", but rather than

imposing specifics, provides a list of what a county might include. The options included reflect policies that have been enacted in other U.S. jurisdictions. Just cause eviction legislation has been introduced numerous times in different Maryland counties, including Montgomery County, where I live and where it has previously been supported by the Montgomery County Council and the Montgomery County legislative delegation. Requiring just cause as a precondition for an eviction can be a policy that boosts the stability of the housing market by stabilizing families, neighborhoods, and communities to the benefit of all.

I respectfully urge a favorable report from the Committee in support of passage of SB0504.