

HEALTH CARE FOR THE HOMELESS TESTIMONY
IN SUPPORT OF
SB 504 - Landlord and Tenant - Residential Leases and Holdover
Tenancies - Local Just Cause Termination Provisions

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
March 7, 2023



Health Care for the Homeless supports SB 504, which would enable local jurisdictions to establish “just cause” or “good cause” limitations on lease non-renewals. This bill expressly grants authority to local legislatures to decide when it is appropriate for rental agreements to be non-renewed. That means local policymakers would be able to determine the kind of “just cause” policy their locality needs, whether by type of building, for certain populations, or under certain circumstances such as a state of emergency. Without HB SB 504, local efforts are stymied by legal concerns around preemption.

In Maryland, a landlord can decide to non-renew without any stated cause. This means that working people and their children face the constant threat of displacement, even when they follow all the rules. They are under constant pressure to accept declining conditions and increasing rents just to stay in their communities.

We know that there is a plethora of health risks associated with the disruptive displacement caused by eviction. Following an eviction, a person’s likelihood of experiencing homelessness significantly increases. Homelessness historically creates new health problems and exacerbates existing ones. Where you or I could easily manage something like diabetes or hypertension in the year 2022, even HIV, the disruptive displacement following an eviction makes caring for these things exponentially harder and sometimes impossible.

We know that mortality among those experiencing homelessness has escalated over the last 5-10 years. On December 21, 2021, Health Care for the Homeless gathered for our Homeless Persons’ Memorial Day in which we remembered the lives of the 165 people with the experience of homelessness who died in 2021. In Health Care for the Homeless’ Supportive Housing department alone we have seen upwards of 15 deaths in the last 12 weeks. To reiterate that is more than one every week. There is no amount of health care that can substitute stable housing.

We know that there is a clear connection between evictions and increased Covid-19 incidence and mortality. the appropriate allocation of funding for access to counsel in evictions across the state of Maryland will help those 9,627 Marylanders and their families avoid lifelong chronic health conditions and the possibility of contracting and dying from Covid-19.

SB 504 recognizes that local legislatures want to aid their renters in achieving stable housing so that they are able contribute long-term to the workforce and the local economy. Requiring just cause as a precondition for an eviction can be a tailored policy that boosts the stability of the housing market by stabilizing families, neighborhoods, and communities. SB 504 ensures local legislatures can pass enforceable laws whereby no one is arbitrarily deprived of their housing.

For the health and safety of the clients we serve and for all Marylanders, Health Care for the Homeless urges a favorable report on HB SB 504.

Health Care for the Homeless is Maryland's leading provider of integrated health services and supportive housing for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. Our mission is to end homelessness through racially equitable health care, housing and advocacy in partnership with those of us who have experienced it. We deliver medical care, mental health services, state-certified addiction treatment, dental care, social services, housing and housing support services for over 10,000 Marylanders annually in Baltimore City and Baltimore County. For more information, visit www.hchmd.org.