

SB0100_Claire Landers_FAV

January 24, 2023

Claire Landers

Baltimore County, 21209

TESTIMONY ON SB0100 - FAVORABLE
Real Property - Actions to Repossess - Proof of Rental Licensure

TO: Chair W. Smith, Vice Chair J. Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Claire Landers

As a resident of District 11, I am submitting testimony in support of SB0100, Holding Illegally Operating Landlords Accountable.

I live in Pikesville and am a congregant of Baltimore Hebrew Congregation. In the Jewish faith, we have a religious tradition extending back 2,000 years that specifies obligations landlords have to maintain properties that are safe and habitable for their tenants. In Jewish law, it falls to the community's leaders to ensure these obligations are met to protect vulnerable tenants..

As a one-time renter, I know what it is like to be a tenant in uninhabitable housing. When I began working at my first job out of college, I shared an apartment in a DC row home that was owned by a man, who we later learned, the Washington Post reported as one of the city's most notorious "slumlords". One day I got a call that my roommates arrived home from work unable to enter because the property had been cordoned off due to dangerous structural disrepair. It meant couch surfing and raiding friends' closets for some time, but I realize we were fortunate in that none of us had children to worry about and care for.

I'd not thought of that experience for years until I sat in to observe Rent Court in Baltimore City and saw dozens of renters, some with children, pleading with judges to stop their evictions: The vast majority represented themselves, unsuccessfully attempting to present evidence, including photos, of gross disrepair that their landlords refused to remediate. Yet, judges did not require landlords or their agents to demonstrate that they had complied with lead abatement mandates or basic licensure. I was absolutely shocked at how this court functioned regularly.

Last session, both chambers of the General Assembly passed SB563 to uphold rental licensing programs and prevent illegally operating landlords from using the expedited eviction process. Governor Hogan vetoed that legislation. Licensed landlords have nothing to fear from SB0100, yet without this legislation, there is no way of holding illegally operating landlords accountable.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB0100.