

HB0036_Claire Landers_FAV
January 19, 2023
Claire Landers
Baltimore County, 21209

TESTIMONY ON HB0036 - FAVORABLE
“HOLDING ILLEGALLY OPERATING LANDLORDS ACCOUNTABLE”

TO: Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Moon, and members of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Claire Landers

As a resident of District 11, I am submitting testimony in support of HB0036, 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 2000 years that specifies obligations of landlords 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 pay rent to a landlord for uninhabitable housing. When I took 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.

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 a judge to stop their evictions: The vast majority represented themselves and many attempted to present testimony, including photos, of gross disrepair that their landlords refused to remediate. Yet, the judge 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 day in, day out.

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. Without this legislation, there is no way of holding illegally operating landlords accountable. Everyone deserves to live in safe homes and this bill would help make that a reality for more Maryland families.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB0036.