

Testimony of Todd Snook – Valley Storage
House Bill 824

Chair Wilson, Vice Chair Crosby, members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Todd Snook, and I am from Hagerstown, Maryland. I am a member of the Maryland Self Storage Association Board of Directors and the owner of Valley Storage, which has eight storage facilities in Maryland. Valley Storage also operates 58 facilities in eight other states, including Virginia, Ohio, North Carolina, and Tennessee.

I ask for your support today for House Bill 824 to modernize the Maryland Self-service Storage Act. The bill would permit storage owners to advertise lien sales on a publicly accessible website. The Act currently requires that the operator, at least 3 days before the sale, to advertise the time, place, and terms of the sale in a newspaper of general circulation in the jurisdiction where the sale is to be held, unless otherwise authorized by the tenant. Importantly, the law does not require publication of the tenant's name.

The purpose of the newspaper advertising requirement is to drive bidders to the sale. It is not to provide notice to the tenant; that has already occurred via the default notices that are sent directly to the tenant. In the more than 40 years since the Act's passage, newspaper readership has dropped significantly. Most states recognize that newspapers are no longer an effective way to advertise upcoming sales. Operators have a strong incentive to advertise in the most effective means possible in their community to maximize the sale price. This also benefits the customer as any excess received above of the debt obligation to the storage owner must be held for the former occupant. This further benefits the customer as newspaper advertising fees are not passed on to them, although collection of the fees rarely occurs.

The changes proposed in HB 824 have been adopted in 30 other states, which either expressly permit the owner to choose the method of alternative advertising or have no advertising requirement at all. Significantly, Virginia amended its Act in 2022 to eliminate the advertising requirement entirely.

I personally have seen the changes contained in House Bill 824 successfully implemented in Virginia, Ohio, North Carolina, and Tennessee where our company also operates facilities. Overall, the bill seeks to bring Maryland law into 2024 by permitting a storage owner to choose the method of advertising that is most effective and appropriate for their business.

I therefore respectfully request your support for the bill.

Thank you again for permitting me to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions.