



Bill Title: House Bill 501, Charter Counties - Enforcement of Local Laws

Committee: Environment and Transportation

Date: February 13, 2024

Position: Unfavorable

This testimony is offered on behalf of the Maryland Multi-Housing Association (MMHA). MMHA is a professional trade association established in 1996, whose members consist of owners and managers of more than 210,000 rental housing homes in over 958 apartment communities. Our members house over 538,000 residents of the State of Maryland. MMHA also represents over 250 associate member companies who supply goods and services to the multi-housing industry.

House Bill 501 allows a charter county to increase its civil and criminal fines and penalties from \$1000 to not exceed \$5,000.

Reasonable fines serve a necessary deterrent. However, allowing charter counties to increase civil and criminal fines and penalties 500% is excessive. We are concerned about the unintended consequences. Within our industry, this could lead to more evictions. Housing providers will be more inclined to find a resident in breach of lease if their conduct results in a \$5000 fine that the property owner must pay. Further, such fines may lead to increased litigation and legal challenges, as individuals and business entities contest the fairness of the fines. This can strain resources within the justice system and result in lengthy legal battles that further burden both the affected parties.

To mitigate these unintended consequences, the Committee should carefully consider the potential impacts of fines, ensure fairness and proportionality in application, and explore alternative approaches to address undesirable behaviors without resorting to punitive measures.

For these reasons, we respectfully request an unfavorable report on House Bill 501.

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