



HB477 Landlord and Tenant - Residential Leases and Holdover Tenancies - Local Just Cause Termination Provisions
Position: Favorable

2/13/2024

The Honorable Delegate Korman, Chair
Environment and Transportation Committee
Room 251
House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

CC: Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee

My name is Zoe Gallagher and I am a Policy Associate at Economic Action Maryland. Economic Action Maryland (formerly the Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition) is a people-centered movement to expand economic rights, housing justice, and community reinvestment for working families, low-income communities, and communities of color. Economic Action Maryland provides direct assistance today while passing legislation and regulations to create systemic change in the future.

I am writing today to urge your favorable report on HB477, which would establish just cause laws, requiring landlords to provide a reason for lease non-renewal.

Our tenant advocacy program has a hotline for renters and landlords to call for advice about their rights and responsibilities under the law as well as receive warm referrals to legal services and other assistance. Our staff attorney also provides brief legal advice to tenants. We serve between 900-1200 Maryland residents a year with the majority of tenants living in Central Maryland. Lease non-renewal is a serious concern, especially with private equity firms purchasing properties all around the state.

Because Maryland is a “no cause” state, a landlord does not have to provide any justification for lease non-renewals, putting tenants in a vulnerable position where they have no idea whether or not their lease will be renewed the following year. Housing stability is incredibly important for the wellbeing of children and adults alike. Low-income children who switch schools frequently due to housing instability tend to perform less well in school and are less likely to graduate from high school. Adults facing housing instability have worse mental health outcomes and higher levels of anxiety and depression¹.

Additionally, moving is an incredibly costly process that can put a renter back thousands of dollars. Not only are tenants required to pay first month’s rent and a new security deposit before receiving the one from their last unit back, they must also pay the cost of moving supplies. It can also be incredibly difficult to even find another unit that is affordable based on income, leading many to become further cost burdened by rent.

¹<https://nhc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/The-Impacts-of-Affordable-Housing-on-Health-A-Research-Summary.pdf>



There have also been instances of landlords retaliating against their low-income tenants for organizing and demanding repairs for safer living conditions by refusing to renew the tenant's lease. Retaliation from landlords is used as a fear tactic to prevent tenants from asking for repairs and improvements in their rental units, forcing tenants to live in substandard housing or risk losing their homes.

Since renters are more likely to be low-income than homeowners,² these problems become an issue of economic justice, where low-income renters are more likely to be thrown into financial instability because of Maryland's "no cause" policy on lease non-renewals.

Everyone should be provided with a reasonable level of housing security regardless of their income level. For these reasons we urge a favorable report on HB477.

Sincerely,
Zoe Gallagher, Policy Associate

²<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/08/02/as-national-eviction-ban-expires-a-look-at-who-rents-and-who-owns-in-the-u-s/>