



100 North Charles Street, 2nd floor
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

410-223-2222
www.brhp.org

February 9, 2024

Delegate Marc Korman, Chair
Delegate Regina T. Boyce, Vice Chair
Room 251
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Support for House Bill 477 – Landlord and Tenant – Residential Leases and Holdover Tenancies – Local Just Cause Termination Provisions

Hearing before the House Environment and Transportation Committee on February 13, 2024

Position: Support (FAV)

Dear Honorable Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee,

We appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership (BRHP). I am writing to express our support for House Bill 477. BRHP is a non-profit organization that expands housing choices for families with low incomes who have historically been excluded from housing in well-resourced neighborhoods, helping them to access and transition successfully to safe, healthy, and economically vibrant communities. As the Regional Administrator for the Baltimore Housing Mobility Program, BRHP has opened pathways to a better future for low-income families for over 10 years. BRHP currently provides over 4,300 low-income families rental assistance in the form of the Housing Choice Voucher and couples that with counseling supports for families as they move from areas of concentrated poverty to areas of opportunity in Baltimore City and the five surrounding counties. BRHP is dedicated to helping achieve racially and socially equitable public policy that ensures low-income families have access to quality and affordable homes in communities of their choice.

We believe that House Bill 477 is a critical step towards protecting tenants from arbitrary lease terminations and promoting housing stability in our communities.

BRHP commends HB 477 for stipulating the requirement for just cause termination, which we believe will help ensure that tenants are protected from displacement unless there is a legitimate reason, such as substantial lease breaches, illegal activities, or the landlord's need to recover the property for personal use. This transparency is crucial in helping tenants understand their rights and for preventing potential abuses of the eviction process.

The Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership is an equal housing opportunity provider.





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Background

Due to pandemic-related eviction moratoriums, the state of Maryland reported record low evictions rates in 2020, 2021, and 2022—a total of over 23,000 evictions combined across three years, averaging roughly 8,000 evictions per year, according to the District Court of Maryland Criminal Case Activity report. Between January 2023 and September 2023, following the end of pandemic-era eviction protections, the number of evictions had nearly doubled, with over 16,000 evictions across the state.

Equity Implications

Additionally, evictions disproportionately affect renters of color and families with young children. According to the Princeton University Eviction Lab, over half of eviction filings are against Black renters, despite the fact that only 18.8% of renters in America identify as Black. Moreover, the rate of risk of eviction is nearly doubled for households with children compared to households without children. The increased risk of eviction for marginalized communities demonstrates that swift action should be taken to address the manner in which evictions are sought.

BRHP supports instituting requirements for timely notification of a landlord's intent to terminate the lease; specifically, 60 days in the case of month-to-month tenancies and 90 days for year-to-year tenancies. We believe this additional window of notice will allow renters more time and flexibility in finding a new unit following notice of a lease termination or non-renewal.

Furthermore, by allowing local jurisdictions to tailor just cause eviction policies to their specific needs, HB 477 recognizes the diverse housing challenges across Maryland and promotes local solutions.

In conclusion, the Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership urges the committee to favorably report House Bill 477. This legislation is a necessary step towards creating a more equitable and stable housing market, where tenants can live without the fear of arbitrary displacement, and landlords operate within a framework of fairness and accountability.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Adria Crutchfield

Adria Crutchfield

Executive Director

