



February 13, 2024

Request for a Favorable Report for House Bill 477, Landlord and Tenant – Residential Leases and
Holdover Tenancies – Local Just Cause Termination Provisions

Dear Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce, Members of the Environment & Transportation Committee,

I represent District 5 on the Montgomery County Council, and I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill 477, enabling legislation sponsored by Delegates Wilkins and Stewart.

HB 477 would enable counties to prohibit residential landlords from failing to renew a lease without substantive justification – or Just Cause – as defined by local law or ordinance. It would not hamper a landlord's ability to evict tenants for failure to pay rent, breach of lease, engaging in illegal activity, causing substantial property damage, or other serious offenses. It aims only to prevent tenant-hold-over evictions for which a clear cause cannot be articulated. This is a baseline level of stability that counties should be permitted to offer to the more than one-third of Marylanders who rent their homes.

My office spends significant time working to compel the owners of a few key rental properties to meet housing codes. A regular hurdle we face is tenants' fear of retaliation if they lodge complaints or organize with other tenants. Retaliatory evictions are banned, but the reality on the ground is that it falls on tenants to prove an action was retaliatory, and that can be difficult. Just Cause protection would shift the burden of proof to the landlord. Instead of a tenant having to prove their landlord was retaliatory, the landlord would need to prove an eviction is justified.

This legislation has been considered before, but this year carries new urgency: Montgomery and Prince George's Counties have just passed rent stabilization laws. Similar bills have been introduced in other jurisdictions. Such legislation should be paired with Just Cause, an option not open to us without this enabling legislation.

Consistent with elements of Governor Moore's 2024 housing agenda, HB 477 provides counties with a proven tool for increasing housing stability for a large segment of our populations. This is the year to get Just Cause done.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I respectfully urge you to report this legislation favorably to the full House of Delegates without delay.

Sincerely,

Councilmember Kristin Mink