

Dear Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

This testimony is being submitted by Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore, a group of individuals working to move white folks as part of a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County. We are working in collaboration with CASA de Maryland and Renters United. I am a resident of 12A. I and my partner are also the landlords of a single property in Howard County. **I am testifying in support of HB477.**



Showing Up for Racial Justice

HB477 allows local jurisdictions to require a just basis for landlords to either refuse to renew or to cut off month-to-month/week-to-week leases. This legislation would enable local legislatures to pass their own laws, if they choose, limiting how and when lease non-renewals occur, requiring landlords to have a just cause to non-renew, or requiring landlords to prove a just cause in court.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, as the rate of non-payment eviction was slowed by court delays and emergency rental assistance, lease-non-renewal evictions roughly doubled. This means that working people and their children face the constant threat of displacement, even when they follow all the rules. They have no choice but to accept declining conditions and increasing rents just to stay in their communities. A 2019 study from Princeton & the Eviction Lab found “just cause eviction ordinances have a significant and noticeable effect on eviction and eviction filing rates. Given the budget limitations of many states and municipalities to fund other solutions to the eviction crisis, passage of just cause eviction ordinances appears to be a relatively low-cost, effective policy solution.”¹ Without this bill, jurisdictions like Montgomery County and Baltimore City face preemption challenges to trying just cause eviction policies. It recognizes that local legislatures know how best to help their renters stay stably housed, contributing to their community.

This issue goes beyond economics to long-standing racial inequities in housing policy. Our partners at CASA recently reported that on November 22, 2023, seven residents of the Evergreen Terrace Apartments in Hyattsville, MD publicly denounced evictions that they believed were unjust, based on false evidence targeting immigrant and working class families.² In October 2023, the National Equity Atlas reported an estimated 98,000 households were behind on their rent in Maryland.³ Of those, 79% of tenants are people of color, including Blacks, Latinx, and Native Americans. Crucially, 47% of those households include children, a disproportionate number of whom are Black and Brown, and social scientists have documented declining school performance, increased drop-out rates, higher rates of adolescent violence, and worse health outcomes as negative outcomes among children who experienced eviction.⁴ People of color form less than half of this state’s population, and helping them remain in their homes ensures we stop perpetuating racial inequities, especially lifelong detriments suffered by children.

As a Mom & Pop landlord, I am not worried about how a just cause eviction statute might impact me. Were such a statute enacted in my county, I would be able to manage my property as I have always done because most of the reasons landlords have to not renew a lease could remain in place. What would improve in that case is the social fabric of the community in which my tenants live and from which my property derives much of its value. Good tenants would be better empowered to remain in their communities if we prioritize their staying over a heedless pursuit of profit above all.

It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote **in support of HB477.**

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,

Erica Palmisano

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Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore

¹ <https://jpia.princeton.edu/news/effect-just-cause-eviction-ordinances-eviction-four-california-cities>

² <https://wearecasa.org/tenants-at-evergreen-terrace-apartments-call-out-discriminatory-and-unjust-evict/>

³ <https://nationalequityatlas.org/rent-debt>

⁴ https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/mdesmond/files/desmondkimbro.evictions.fallout.sf2015_2.pdf